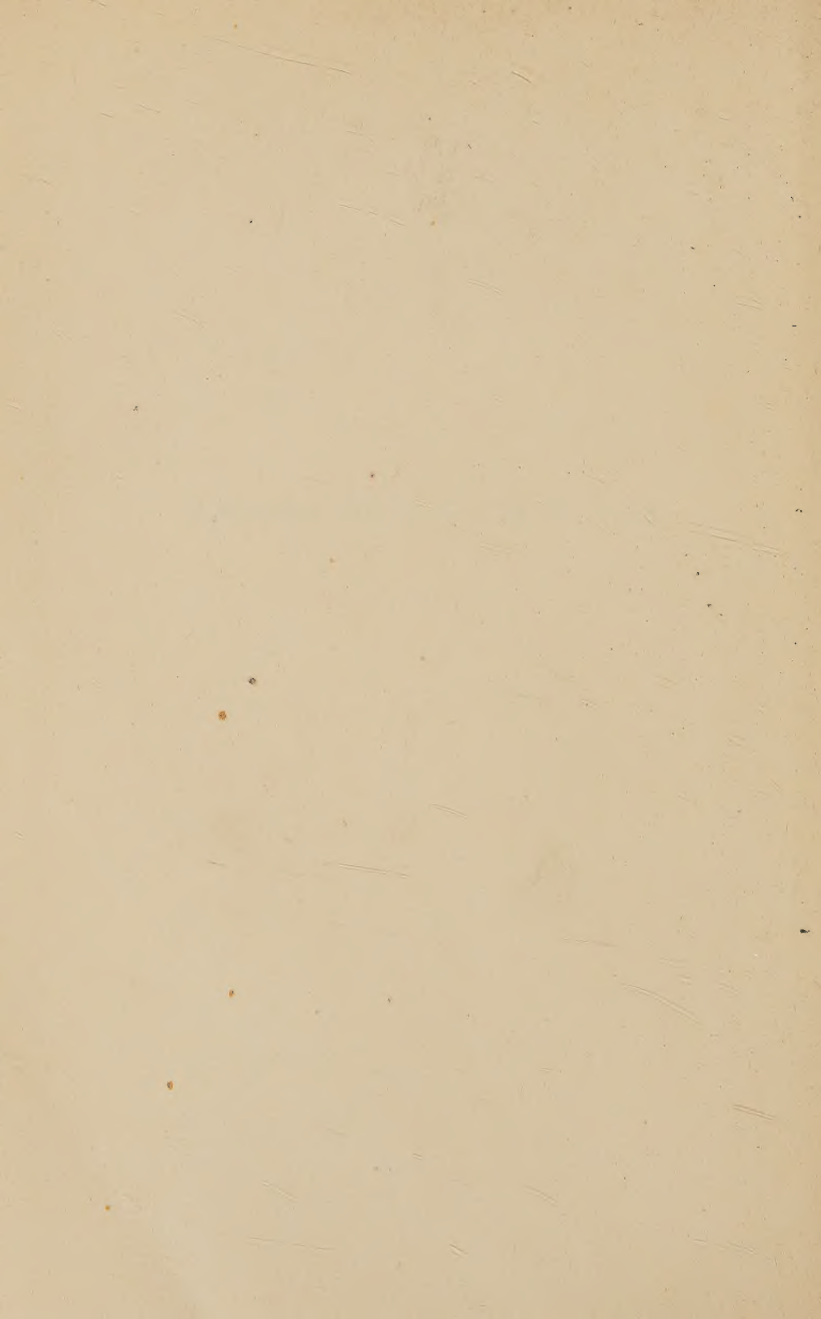




THE RIM OF THE DESERT

ADA
WOODRUFF
ANDERSON

THE RIM OF THE DESERT





He worked tirelessly, as though he was determined to infuse her numb veins with his own vigor.

FRONTISPIECE. *See Page 335.*

THE RIM OF THE DESERT

By ADA WOODRUFF ANDERSON

AUTHOR OF

"The Strain of White,"
"The Heart of the Red Firs," Etc.



With Frontispiece by
MONTE CREWS

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To the Memory of
MY MOTHER

A gentle and appreciative critic, the only one, perhaps,
who re-read my previous books with pleasure
and found no flaw in them, and who would
have had a greater interest than any
other in this publication.

FOREWORD

The desert of this story is that semi-arid region east of the upper Columbia. It is cut off from the moisture laden winds of the Pacific by the lofty summits of the Cascade Mountains which form its western rim, and for many miles the great river crowds the barrier, winding, breaking in rapids, seeking a way through. To one approaching this rim from the dense forests of the westward slopes, the sage grown levels seem to stretch limitless into the far horizon, but they are broken by hidden coulees; in propitious seasons reclaimed areas have yielded phenomenal crops of wheat, and under irrigation the valley of one of the two tributaries from the west, wherein lies Hesperides Vale, has become a garden spot of the world.

To the initiated I wish to say if in the chapters touching on the Alaska coal cases I have followed too literally the statements of prominent men, it was not in an effort to portray them but merely to represent as clearly as possible the Alaska situation.

ADA WOODEUFF ANDERSON.

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THE RIM OF THE DESERT

CHAPTER I

THE MAN WHO NEVER CAME BACK

IT is in October, when the trails over the wet tundra harden, and before the ice locks Bering Sea, that the Alaska exodus sets towards Seattle; but there were a few members of the Arctic Circle in town that first evening in September to open the clubhouse on the Lake Boulevard with an informal little supper for special delegate Feversham, who had arrived on the steamer from the north, on his way to Washington.

The clubhouse, which was built of great, hewn logs, with gabled eaves, stood in a fringe of firs, and an upper rear balcony afforded a broad outlook of lake and forest, with the glaciated heights of the Cascade Mountains breaking a far horizon. The day had been warm, but a soft breeze, drawing across this veranda through the open door, cooled the assembly room, and, lifting one of the lighter hangings of Indian-wrought elk leather, found the stairs and raced with a gentle rustle through the lower front entrance back into the night. It had caressed many familiar things on its way, for the walls were embellished with trophies from the big spaces where winds are born. There were skins of polar and Kodiak bear; of silver and black fox; there

were antlered heads set above the fireplace and on the rough, bark-seamed pillars that supported the unceiled roof. A frieze of pressed and framed Alaska flora finished the low gallery which extended around three sides of the hall, and the massive chairs, like the polished banquet board, were of crocus-yellow Alaska cedar.

The delegate, who had come out to tide-water over the Fairbanks-Valdez trail, was describing with considerable heat the rigors of the journey. The purple parka, which was the regalia of the Circle, seemed to increase his prominence of front and intensified the color in his face to a sort of florid ripeness.

"Yes, gentlemen," he continued, thumping the table with a stout hand and repeating the gesture slowly, while the glasses trembled, "Alaska's crying need is a railroad; a single finished line from the most northern harbor open to navigation the whole year — and that is Prince William Sound — straight through to the Tanana Valley and the upper Yukon. Already the first problem has been solved; we have pierced the icy barrier of the Coast Range. All we are waiting for is further right of way; the right to the forests, that timber may be secured for construction work; the right to mine coal for immediate use. But, gentlemen, we may grow gray waiting. What do men four thousand miles away, men who never saw Alaska, care about our needs?" He leaned back in his chair, while his glance moved from face to face and rested, half in challenge, on the member at the foot of the board. "These commissioners appointed off there in Washington," he added. "These carpet-baggers from the little States beyond the Mississippi!"

Hollis Tisdale, who had spent some of the hardest years of his Alaska career in the service of the Government, met the delegate's look with a quiet humor in his eyes.

"It seems to me," he said, and his deep, expressive voice

instantly held the attention of every one, "that such a man, with intelligence and insight, of course, stands the surest chance of giving general satisfaction in the end. He is at least disinterested, while the best of us, no matter how big he is, how clear-visioned, is bound to take his own district specially to heart. Prince William Sound alone has hundreds of miles of coast-line and includes more than one fine harbor with an ambitious seaport."

At this a smile rippled around the table, and Miles Feversham, who was the attorney for one of the most ambitious syndicates of promoters in the north, gave his attention to the menu. But Tisdale, having spoken, turned his face to the open balcony door. His parka was thrown back, showing an incongruous breadth of stiff white bosom, yet he was the only man present who wore the garment with grace. In that moment the column of throat rising from the purple folds, the upward, listening pose of the fine head, in relief against the bearskin on the wall behind his chair, suggested a Greek medallion. His brown hair, close-cut, waved at the temples; lines were chiseled at the corners of his eyes and, with a lighter touch, about his mouth; yet his face, his whole compact, muscular body, gave an impression of youth,—youth and power and the capacity for great endurance. His friends said the north never had left a mark of its grip on Tisdale. The life up there that had scarred, crippled, wrecked most of them seemed only to have mellowed him.

"But," resumed Feversham quickly, "I shall make a stiff fight at Washington; I shall force attention to our suspended land laws; demand the rights the United States allows her western territories; I shall ask for the same concessions that were the making of the Oregon country; and first and last I shall do all I can to loosen the strangling clutch of Conservation." He paused, while his hand fell still more heavily on the table, and the glasses

jingled anew. "And, gentlemen, the day of the floating population is practically over; we have our settled communities, our cities; we are ready for a legislative body of our own; the time has come for Home Rule. But the men who make our laws must be familiar with the country, have allied interests. Gentlemen,"—his voice, dropping its aggressive tone, took a honeyed insistence,— "we want in our first executive a man who knows us intimately, who has covered our vast distances, whose vision has broadened; a man big enough to hold the welfare of all Alaska at heart."

The delegate finished this period with an all-embracing smile and, nodding gently, leaned back again in his chair. But in the brief silence that followed, he experienced a kind of shock. Foster, the best known mining engineer from Prince William Sound to the Tanana, had turned his eyes on Tisdale; and Banks, Lucky Banks, who had made the rich strike in the Iditarod wilderness, also looked that way. Then instantly their thought was telegraphed from face to face. When Feversham allowed his glance to follow the rest, it struck him as a second shock that Tisdale was the only one on whom the significance of the moment was lost.

The interval passed. Tisdale stirred, and his glance, coming back from the door, rested on a dish that had been placed before him. "Japanese pheasant!" he exclaimed. The mellowness glowed in his face. He lifted his eyes, and the delegate, meeting that clear, direct gaze, dropped his own to his plate. "Think of it! Game from the other side of the Pacific. They look all right, but—do you know?"—the lines deepened humorously at the corners of his mouth—"nothing with wings ever seems quite as fine to me as ptarmigan."

"Ptarmigan!" Feversham suspended his fork in astonishment. "Not ptarmigan?"

"Yes," persisted Tisdale gently, "ptarmigan; and particularly the ones that nest in Nunatak Arm."

There was a pause, while for the first time his eyes swept the Circle. He still held the attention of every one, but with a difference; the tenseness had given place to a pleased expectancy.

Then Foster said: "That must have been on some trip you made, while you were doing geological work around St. Elias."

Tisdale shook his head. "No, it was before that; the year I gave up Government work to have my little fling at prospecting. You were still in college. Every one was looking for a quick route to the Klondike then, and I believed if I could push through the Coast Range from Yakutat Bay to the valley of the Alsek, it would be smooth going straight to the Yukon. An old Indian I talked with at the mission told me he had made it once on a hunting trip, and Weatherbee — you all remember David Weatherbee — was eager to try it with me. The Tlinket helped us with the outfit, canoeing around the bay and up into the Arm to his starting point across Nunatak glacier. But it took all three of us seventy-two days to pack the year's supplies over the ice. We tramped back and forth in stages, twelve hundred miles. We hadn't been able to get dogs, and in the end, when winter overtook us in the mountains, we cached the outfit and came out."

"And never went back." Banks laughed, a shrill, mirthless laugh, and added in a higher key: "Lost a whole year and — the outfit."

Tisdale nodded slowly. "All we gained was experience. We had plenty of that to invest the next venture over the mountains from Prince William Sound. But — do you know? — I always liked that little canoe trip around from Yakutat. I can't tell you how fine it is in that upper fiord; big peaks and ice walls growing all around. Yes"

— he nodded again, while the genial wrinkles deepened — “I’ve seen mountains grow. We had a shock once that raised the coast-line forty-five feet. And another time, while we were going back to the village for a load, a small glacier in a hanging valley high up, perhaps two thousand feet, toppled right out of its cradle into the sea. It stirred things some and noise” — he shook his head with an expressive sound that ended in a hissing whistle. “But it missed the canoe, and the wave it made lifted us and set us safe on top of a little rocky island.” He paused again, laughing softly. “I don’t know how we kept right side up, but we did. Weatherbee was great in an emergency.”

A shadow crossed his face. He looked off to the end of the room.

“I guess you both understood a canoe,” said Banks. His voice was still high-pitched, like that of a man under continued stress, and his eyes burned in his withered, weather-beaten face like the vents of buried fires. “But likely it was then, while you was freighting the outfit around to the glacier, you came across those ptarmigan.”

Tisdale’s glance returned, and the humor played again softly at the corners of his eyes. “I had forgotten about those birds. It was this way. I made the last trip in the canoe alone, for the mail and a small load, principally ammunition and clothing, while Weatherbee and the Tlinket pushed ahead on one of those interminable stages over the glacier. And on the way back, I was caught in fog. It rolled in, layer on layer, while I felt for the landing; but I managed to find the place and picked up the trail we had worn packing over the ice. And I lost it; probably in a new thaw that had opened and glazed over since I left. Anyhow, in a little while I didn’t know where I was. I had given my compass to Weatherbee, and there was no sun to take bearings from, not a landmark in sight.

Nothing but fog and ice, and it all looked alike. The surface was too hard to take my impressions, so I wasn't able to follow my own tracks back to the landing. But I had to keep moving, it was so miserably cold; I hardly let myself rest at night; and that fog hung on five days. The third evening I found myself on the water-front, and pretty soon I stumbled on my canoe. I was down to a mighty small allowance of crackers and cheese then, but I parcelled it out in rations for three days and started once more along the shore for Yakutat. The next night I was traveling by a sort of sedge when I heard ptarmigan. It sounded good to me, and I brought my canoe up and stepped out. I couldn't see, but I could hear those birds stirring and cheeping all around. I lay down and lifted my gun ready to take the first that came between me and the sky." His voice had fallen to an undertone, and his glance rested an absent moment on the circle of light on the rafter above an electric lamp. "When it did, and I blazed, the whole flock rose. I winged two. I had to grope for them in the reeds, but I found them, and I made a little fire and cooked one of them in a tin pail I carried in the canoe. But when I had finished that supper and pushed off — do you know? —" his look returned, moving humorously from face to face — "I was hungrier than I had been before. And I just paddled back and cooked the other one."

There was a stir along the table; a sighing breath. Then some one laughed, and Banks piped his strained note. "And," he said after a moment, "of course you kept on to that missionary camp and waited for the fog to lift."

Tisdale shook his head. "After that supper, there wasn't any need; I turned back to the glacier. And before I reached the landing, I heard Weatherbee's voice booming out on the thick silence like a siren at sea; piloting me straight to that one dip in the ice-wall."

He looked off again to the end of the room, absently, with the far-sighted gaze of one accustomed to travel great solitudes. It was as though he heard again that singing voice. Then suddenly his expression changed. His eyes had rested on a Kodiak bearskin that hung against a pillar at the top of the gallery steps. The corner was unlighted, in heavy shadow, but a hand reaching from behind had drawn the rug slightly aside, and its whiteness on the brown fur, the flash of a jewelled ring, caught his attention. The next moment the hand was withdrawn. He gave it no more thought then, but a time came afterward when he remembered it.

"Weatherbee had noticed that fog-bank," he went on, "from high up the glacier. It worried him so he finally turned back to meet me, and he had waited so long he was down to his last biscuit. I was mighty reckless about that second ptarmigan, but the water the birds were cooked in made a fine soup. And the fog broke, and we overtook the Tlinket and supplies the next morning."

There was another stir along the table, then Foster said: "That was a great voice of Weatherbee's. I've seen it hearten a whole crowd on a mean trail, like the bugle and fife of a regiment."

"So have I." It was Lucky Banks who spoke. "So have I. And Weatherbee was always ready to stand by a poor devil in a tight place. When the frost got me"—he held up a crippled and withered hand—"it was Dave Weatherbee who pulled me through. We were mushing it on the same stampede from Fairbanks to Ruby Creek, and he never had seen me before. It had come to the last day, and we were fighting it out in the teeth of a blizzard. You all know what that means. In the end we just kept the trail, following the hummocks. Sometimes it was a pack under a drift, or maybe a sled; and sometimes it was a hand reaching up through the snow, frozen stiff. Then

it came my turn, and I lay down in my tracks. But Weatherbee stopped to work over me. He wouldn't go on. He said if I was determined to stay in that cemet'ry, I could count on his company. And when he got me on my feet, he just started 'Dixie,' nice and lively, and the next I knew he had me all wound up and set going again, good as new."

His laugh, like the treble notes of the Arctic wind, gave an edge to the story.

Presently Foster said: "That was Weatherbee; I never knew another such man. Always effacing himself when it came to a choice; always ready to share a good thing. Why, he made some of his friends rich, and yet in the end, after seven years of it, seven years of struggle of the worst kind, what did he have to show?"

"Nothing, Foster; nothing but seven feet of earth up there on the edge of the wilderness." Tisdale's voice vibrated gently; an emotion like the surface stir of shaken depths crossed his face. "And a tract of unimproved desert down here in eastern Washington," he added.

"And Mrs. Weatherbee," supplemented Feversham quickly. "You mustn't forget her. Any man must have counted such a wife his most valuable asset. Here's to her! Young, charming, clever; a typical American beauty!" He stopped to drain his glass, then went on. "I remember the day Weatherbee sailed for Alaska. I was taking the same steamer, and she was on the dock, with all Seattle, to see the Argonauts away. It was a hazardous journey into the Unknown in those days, and scenes were going on all around — my own wife was weeping on my shoulder — but Mrs. Weatherbee, and she had just been married then, bridged the parting like a little trump. 'Well, David,' she said, with a smile to turn a priest's head, 'good-by and good luck. Come back when you've made your fortune, and I'll help you to spend it.'"

The delegate, laughing deeply, reached for the port decanter to refill his glass. No one else saw the humor of the story, though the man with the maimed hand again gave an edge to the silence that followed with his strained, mirthless laugh. Presently he said: "But he never came back."

"No." It was Foster who answered. "No, but he was on his way out to the States at last, when the end came. I don't understand it. It seems incredible that Weatherbee, who had won through so many times, handicapped by the waifs and strays of the trail,—Weatherbee, to whom the Susitna country was an open scroll,—should have perished as he did. But it was you who found him, Hollis. Come, tell us all about it."

Tisdale shook his head. "Some other time, Foster. It's a long story and not the kind to tell here."

"Go on! Go on!" The urging came from many, and Banks added in his high, tense key: "I guess we can stand it. Most of us saw the iron side of Alaska before we saw the golden."

"Well, then," Tisdale began reluctantly, "I must take you back a year. I was completing trail reconnaissance from the new Alaska Midway surveys in the Susitna Valley, through Rainy Pass, to connect with the mail route from the interior to Nome, and, to avoid returning another season, kept my party late in the field. It was the close of September when we struck Seward Peninsula and miserably cold, with gales sweeping in from Bering Sea. The grass had frozen, and before we reached a cache of oats I had relied on, most of our horses perished; we arrived at Nome too late for the last steamer of the year. That is how I came to winter there, and why a letter Weatherbee had written in October was so long finding me. It was forwarded from Seattle with other mail I cabled for, back to Prince William Sound, over the Fairbanks-Valdez trail, and

out again by the winter route three thousand miles to Nome. It was the middle of March when I received it, and he had asked me to buy his half interest in the Aurora mine. He needed the money to go out to the States."

Tisdale's voice broke a little; and for a moment he looked off through the open door. "Perhaps some of you remember I grub-staked him for a half share when he left the Tanana to prospect down along the Alaska Range. After he located, I forwarded him small amounts several times to carry on development work. I never had been on the ground, but he explained he was handicapped by high water and was trying to divert the channel of a creek. In that last letter he said he had carried the scheme nearly through; the next season would pay my money back and more; the Aurora would pan out the richest strike he had ever made. But that did not trouble me. I knew if Weatherbee had spent two years on that placer, the gravels had something to show. The point that weighed was that he was willing to go home at last to the States. I had urged him before I put up the grub-stake, but he had answered: 'Not until I have made good.' It was hardly probable that, failing to hear from me, he had sold out to any one else. From his description, the Aurora was isolated; hundreds of miles from the new Iditarod camp; he hadn't a neighbor in fifty miles. So I forwarded his price and arranged with the mail carrier to send a special messenger on from the nearest post. In the letter I wrote to explain my delay, I sketched a plan of my summer's work and told him how sorry I was I had missed seeing him while the party was camped below Rainy Pass. Though I couldn't have spared the time to go to the Aurora, he might have found me, had I sent an Indian with word. It was the first time I had gone through his orbit without letting him know.

"But after that carrier had gone, Weatherbee's letter

kept worrying me. It wasn't like him to complain, yet he had written he was tired of the eternal winters; he couldn't stand those everlasting snow peaks sometimes, they got to crowding him so; they kept him awake when he needed sleep, threatening him. 'I've got to break away from them, Hollis,' he said, 'and get where it's warm once more; and when my blood begins to thaw, I'll show you I can make a go of things.' Then he reminded me of the land he owned down here on the eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains. The soil was the finest volcanic ash; the kind that grew the vineyards on Vesuvius, and he meant to plant it with grapes; with orchards, too, on the bench levels. All the tract needed was water, but there was a natural reservoir and spring on a certain high plateau that could be easily tapped with a flume."

Tisdale paused while his glance moved slowly, singling out those who had known Weatherbee. A great gentleness rested on his face, and when he went on, it crept like a caress through his voice. "Most of you have heard him talk about that irrigation scheme; some of you have seen those plans he used to work on, long Alaska nights. It was his dream for years. He went north in the beginning just to accumulate capital enough to swing that project. But the more I studied that letter, the more confident I was he had stayed his limit; he was breaking, and he knew it. That was why he was so anxious to turn the Aurora over to me and get to the States. Finally I decided to go with the mail carrier and on to the mine. If Weatherbee was still there, as I believed, we would travel to Fairbanks together and take the Valdez trail out to the open harbor on Prince William Sound. I picked up a team of eight good huskies — the weather was clear with a moon in her second quarter — and I started light, cutting my stops short; but when I left Nome I had lost four days."

Hollis paused another interval, looking off again

through the open door, while the far-sighted expression gathered in his eyes. It was as though his listeners also in that moment saw those white solitudes stretching limitless under the Arctic night.

"I never caught up with that carrier," he went on, "and the messenger he sent on broke trail for me all the way to the Aurora. I met him on his return trip, thirty hours out from the mine. But he had found Weatherbee there, and had a deed for me which David had asked him to see recorded and forwarded to me at Nome. It was a relief to hear he had been able to attend to these business matters, but I wondered why he had not brought the deed himself, since he must come that way to strike the Fairbanks trail, and why the man had not waited to travel with him. Then he told me Weatherbee had decided to use the route I had sketched in my letter. The messenger had tried to dissuade him; he had reminded him there were no road-houses, and that the traces left by my party must have been wiped out by the winter snows. But Weatherbee argued that the new route would shorten the distance to open tide-water hundreds of miles; that his nearest neighbors were in that direction, fifty miles to the south; and they would let him have dogs. Then, when he struck the Susitna Valley, he would have miles of railroad bed to ease the last stage. So, at the time the messenger left the Aurora, Weatherbee started south on his long trek to Rainy Pass. He was mushing afoot, with Tyce pulling the sled. Some of you must remember that big husky with a strain of St. Bernard he used to drive on the Tanana."

"My, yes," piped little Banks, and his eyes scintillated like chippings of blue glacier ice. "Likely I do remember Tyce. Dave picked him up that same trip he set me on my feet. He found him left to starve on the trail with a broken leg. And he camped right there, pitched his tent

for a hospital, and went to whittling splints out of a piece of willow to set that bone. 'I am sorry to keep you waiting,' he says to me, 'but he is a mighty good dog. He would have done his level best to see the man who deserted him through.' And he would. I'd bank my money on old Tyee."

Tisdale nodded slowly. "But my chance to overtake David was before he secured that team fifty miles on. And I pushed my dogs too hard. When I reached the Aurora, they were nearly done for. I was forced to rest them a day. That gave me time to look into Weatherbee's work. I found that the creek where he had made his discovery ran through a deep and narrow canyon, and it was clear to me that the boxed channel, which was frozen solid then, was fed during the short summer by a small glacier at the top of the gorge. To turn the high water from his placer, he had made a bore of nearly one thousand feet and practically through rock. I followed a bucket tramway he had rigged to lift the dump and found a primitive lighting-plant underground. The whole tunnel was completed, with the exception of a thin wall left to safeguard against an early thaw in the stream, while the bore was being equipped with a five-foot flume. You all know what that means, hundreds of miles from navigation or a main traveled road. To get that necessary lumber, he felled trees in a spruce grove up the ravine; every board was hewn by hand. And about two-thirds of those sluice-boxes, the bottoms fitted with riffles, were finished. Afterwards, at that camp where he stopped for dogs, I learned that aside from a few days at long intervals, when the two miners had exchanged their labor for some engineering, he had made his improvements alone, single-handed. And most of that flume was constructed in those slow months he waited to hear from me."

Tisdale paused, and again his glance sought the faces

of those who had known David Weatherbee. But all the Circle was strung responsive. Those who never had known Weatherbee understood the terrible conditions he had braved; the body-wracking toil underground; the soul-breaking solitude; the crowding silence that months earlier he had felt the necessity to escape. In that picked company, the latent force in each acknowledged the iron courage of the man; but it was Tisdale's magnetic personality, the unstudied play of expression in his rugged face, the undercurrent of emotion quickening through infinite tones of his voice, that plumbed the depths and in every listener struck the dominant chord. And, too, these men had bridged subconsciously those vast distances between Tisdale's start from Nome in clear weather, "with a moon in her second quarter," and that stop at the deserted mine, when his dogs — powerful huskies, part wolf, since they were bred in the Seward Peninsula — "were nearly done for." Long and inevitable periods of dark there had been; perils of white blizzard, of black frost. They had run familiarly the whole gamut of hardship and danger he himself must have faced single-handed; and while full measure was accorded Weatherbee, the greater tribute passed silently, unsought, to the man who had traveled so far and so fast to rescue him.

"It ought to have been me," exclaimed Lucky Banks at last in his high treble. "I was just down in the Iditarod country, less than three hundred miles. I ought to have run up once in awhile to see how he was getting along. But I never thought of Dave's needing help himself, and nobody told me he was around. I'd ought to have kept track of him, though; it was up to me. But go on, Hollis; go on. I bet you made up that day you lost at the mine. My, yes, I bet you broke the record hitting that fifty-mile camp."

Tisdale nodded, and for an instant the humor played

lightly at the corners of his eyes. "It took me just seven hours with an up-grade the last twenty miles. You see, I had Weatherbee to break trail. He rested a night at the camp and lost about three hours more, while they hunted a missing husky to make up his team. Still he pushed out with nearly eighteen hours start and four fresh dogs, with Tyee pulling a strong lead; while I wasn't able to replace even one of mine that had gone lame. I had to leave him there, and before I reached the summit of Rainy Pass, I was carrying his mate on my sled. But I had a sun then, — the days were lengthening fast into May, — and by cutting my stops short I managed to hold my own to the divide. After that I gained. Finally, one morning, I came to a rough place where his outfit had upset, and I saw his dogs were giving him trouble. There were blood stains all around on the snow. It looked like the pack had broken open, and the huskies had tried to get at the dried salmon. Tyee must have fought them off until Weatherbee was able to master them. At the end of the next day I reached a miners' cabin where he had spent the night, and the man who had helped him unhitch told me he had had to remind him to feed his dogs. He had seemed all right, only dead tired; but he had gone to bed early and, neglecting to leave a call, had slept fifteen hours. I rested my team five, and late the next morning I came upon his camp-fire burning."

Tisdale paused to draw his hand across his eyes and met Foster's look over the table. "It was there I blundered. There was a plain traveled trail from that mine down through the lowlands to Susitna, and I failed to see that his tracks left it: they were partly blotted out in a fresh fall of snow. I lost six hours there, and when I picked up his trail again, I saw he was avoiding the few way houses; he passed the settlement by; then I missed his camp-fire. It was plain he was afraid to sleep any more. But he knew the Susitna country; he kept a true course,

and sometimes, in swampy places, turned back to the main thoroughfare. At last, near the crossing of the Matanuska, I was caught in the first spring thaw. It was heavy going. All the streams were out of banks; the valley became a network of small sloughs undermining the snow-fields, creating innumerable ponds and lakes. The earth, bared in patches, gave and oozed like a sponge. It was impossible to follow Weatherbee's trail, but I picked it up once more, where it came into the other, along the Chugach foot-hills. Slides began to block the way; ice glazed the overflows at night; and at last a cold wave struck down from the summits; the track stiffened in an hour and it was hard as steel underfoot. The wind cut like swords. Then came snow."

Tisdale looked off with his far-sighted gaze through the open door. Every face was turned to him, but no one hurried him. It was a time when silence spoke.

"I came on Weatherbee's dogs in a small ravine," he said. "They had broken through thin ice in an overflow, and the sled had mired in muck. The cold wave set them tight; their legs were planted like posts, and I had to cut them out. Two were done for."

"You mean," exclaimed Banks, "Dave hadn't cut the traces to give his huskies a chance."

Tisdale nodded slowly. "But the instant I cut Tyee loose, he went limping off, picking up his master's trail. It was a zigzag course up the face of a ridge into a grove of spruce. Weatherbee took a course like a husky; location was a sixth sense to him; yet I found his tracks up there, winding aimlessly. It had stopped snowing then, but the first impressions were nearly filled. In a little while I noticed the spaces were shorter between the prints of the left shoe; they made a dip and blur. Then I came into a parallel trail, and these tracks were clear, made since the snowstorm, but there was the same favoring of the

left foot. He was traveling in a circle. Sometimes in unsheltered places, where the wind swept through an avenue of trees, small drifts covered the impressions, but the dog found them again, still doubling that broad circle. Finally I saw a great dark blotch ahead where the ground sloped up to a narrow plateau. And in a moment I saw it was caused by a great many fresh twigs of spruce, all stuck upright in the snow and set carefully in rows, like a child's make-believe garden."

Tisdale's voice broke. He was looking off again into the night, and his face hardened; two vertical lines like clefts divided his brows. It was as though the iron in the man cropped through. The pause was breathless. Here and there a grim face worked.

"When the dog reached the spot," Hollis went on, "he gave a quick bark and ran with short yelps towards a clump of young trees a few yards off. The rim of a drift formed a partial windbreak, but he had only a low bough to cover him,—and the temperature,—along those ice-peaks —"

His voice failed. There was another speaking silence. It was as though these men, having followed all those hundreds of miles over tundra and mountains, through thaw and frost, felt with him in that moment the heart-breaking futility of his pursuit. "I tried my best," he added. "I guess you all know that, but — I was too late."

The warning blast of an automobile cut the stillness, and the machine stopped in front of the clubhouse, but no one at the table noticed the interruption.

Then Banks said, in his high key: "But you hitched his dogs up with yours, the ones that were fit, and brought him through to Seward. You saw him buried. Thank you for that."

Feversham cleared his throat and reached for the decanter. "Think of it!" he exclaimed. "A man like that,

lost on a main traveled thoroughfare! But the toll will go on every year until we have a railroad. Here's to that road, gentlemen. Here's to the Alaska Midway and Home Rule."

The toast was responded to, and it was followed by others. But Tisdale had left his place to step through the open door to the balcony. Presently Foster joined him. They stood for an interval smoking and taking in those small night sounds for which long intimacy with Nature teaches a man to listen; the distant voice of running water; the teasing note of the breeze; the complaint of a balsam-laden bough; the restless stir of unseen wings; the patter of diminutive feet. A wooded point that formed the horn of a bay was etched in black on the silver lake; then suddenly the moon illumined the horizon and, rising over a stencilled crest of the Cascades, stretched her golden path to the shore below them. Both these men, watching it, saw that other trail reaching white, limitless, hard as steel through the Alaska solitudes.

"At Seward," said Foster at last, "you received orders by cable detailing you to a season in the Matanuska fields; but before you took your party in, you sent a force of men back to the Aurora to finish Weatherbee's work and begin operations. And the diverting of that stream exposed gravels that are going to make you rich. You deserve it. I grant that. It's your compensation; but just the same it gives a sharper edge to poor Weatherbee's luck."

Tisdale swung around. "See here, Foster, I want you to know I should have considered that money as a loan if David had lived. If he had lived — and recovered — I should have made him take back that half interest in the Aurora. You've got to believe that; and I would be ready to do as much for his wife, if she had treated him differently. But she wrecked his life. I hold her responsible."

Foster was silent.

"Think of it!" Hollis went on. "The shame of it! All those years while he faced privation, the worst kind, tramping Alaska trails, panning in icy streams, sluicing, digging sometimes like any common laborer, wintering in shacks, she was living in luxury down here. He never made a promising discovery that he wasn't forced to sell. She spent his money faster than he made it; kept him handicapped. And all she ever gave him was a friendly letter now and then, full of herself and the gay life she led, and showing clearly how happy she could be without him. Think of it, Foster!" His voice deepened and caught its vibrant quality. "A fine fellow like Weatherbee; so reliable, so great in a hard place. How could she have treated him as she did? Damn it! How could he have thrown himself away like that, for a feather-headed woman?"

Foster knocked the ash from the end of his cigar. "You don't know her," he answered. "If you did, you wouldn't put it in that way." He smiled a little and looked off at the golden path on the lake. "So," he said after a moment, and his glance returned to meet Tisdale's squarely, "she has absolutely nothing now but that tract of unimproved desert on the other side of the Cascades."

CHAPTER II

THE QUESTION

SOMETIME, high on a mountain slope, a cross current of air, or perhaps a tremor of the surface occasioned far off, starts the small snow-cap, that sliding, halting, impelled forward again, always accumulating, gathering momentum, finally becomes the irresistible avalanche. So Marcia Feversham, the following morning, gave the first slight impetus to the question that eventually menaced Tisdale with swift destruction. She was not taking the early train with her husband; she desired to break the long journey and, after the season in the north, prolong the visit with her relatives in Seattle. The delegate had left her sleeping, but when he had finished the light breakfast served him alone in the Morganstein dining-room and hurried out to the waiting limousine, to his surprise he found her in the car. "I am going down to see you away," she explained; "this salt breeze with the morning tide is so delightfully fresh."

There was no archness in her glance; her humor was wholly masculine. A firm mouth, brilliant, dark eyes, the heavy Morganstein brows that met over the high nose, gave weight and intensity to anything she said. Her husband, in coaching her for the coming campaign at Washington, had told her earnestness was her strong suit; that her deep, deliberate voice was her best card, but she held in her eyes, unquestionably, both bowers.

"Delightful of you, I am sure," he answered, taking the seat beside her, with his for-the-public smile, "but I give

credit to the air; you are looking as brilliant at this outrageous hour as you would on your way to an afternoon at bridge." Then, the chauffeur having closed the door and taken his place in the machine, Feversham turned a little to scrutinize her face.

"Now, my lady," he asked, "to what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Mr. Tisdale," she answered directly. "Of course you must see now, even if I do contrive to meet him through Frederic, as you suggested, and manage to see him frequently; even if I find out what he means to say in those coal reports, when it comes to influence, I won't have the weight of a feather. No woman could. He is made of iron, and his principles were cast in the mold."

"Every man has his vulnerable point, and I can trust you to find Hollis Tisdale's." The delegate paused an instant, still regarding his wife's face, frowning a little, yet not without humor, then said: "But you have changed your attitude quickly. Where did you learn so much about him? How can you be so positive about a man you never have met? Whom you have seen only a time or two at a distance, on some street — or was it a hotel lobby? — in Valdez or Fairbanks?"

"Yesterday, when we were talking, that was true; but since then I have seen him at close range. I've heard him." She turned and met Feversham's scrutiny with the brilliancy rising in her eyes. "Last night at the clubhouse, when he told the story of David Weatherbee, I was there."

"You were there? Impossible! That is against the rules. Not a man of the Circle would have permitted it, and you certainly would have been discovered before you reached the assembly hall. Why, I myself was the last to arrive. Frederic, you remember, had to speed the car a little to get me there. And I looked back from the door

and saw you in the tonneau with Elizabeth, while Mrs. Weatherbee kept her place in front with Frederic. You were going down the boulevard to spend the evening with her at Vivian Court."

"That was our plan, but we turned back," she explained. "We had a curiosity to see the Circle seated around the banquet board in those ridiculous purple parkas. And Frederic bet me a new electric runabout against the parka of silver fox and the mukluks I bought of the Esquimau girl at Valdez that we never could get as far as the assembly room. He waited with Elizabeth in the car while we two crept up the stairs. The door was open, and we stood almost screened by that portière of Indian leather, peeping in. Mr. Tisdale was telling the ptarmigan yarn—it's wonderful the power he has to hold the interest of a crowd of men—and the chance was too good to miss. We stole on up the steps to the gallery,—no one noticed us,—and concealed ourselves behind that hanging Kodiak bearskin."

"Incredible!" exclaimed Feversham. "But I see you arrived at the opportune moment,—when Tisdale was talking. There's something occult about the personality of that man. And she, Mrs. Weatherbee, heard everything?"

Marcia nodded. "Even your graceful toast to her."

At this he settled back in his seat, laughing. "Well, I am glad I made it. I could hardly have put it more neatly had I known she was there."

"She couldn't have missed a word. We had found a bench behind the Kodiak skin, and she sat straight as a soldier, listening through it all. I couldn't get her to come away; it was as though she was looking on at an interesting play. She was just as neutral and still; only her face turned white, and her eyes were wide as stars, and once she gripped the fur of the Kodiak so hard I ex-

pected to see it come down. But I know she failed to grasp the vital point of the story. I mean the point vital to her. She doesn't understand enough about law. And I myself slept on it the night through before I saw. It came the moment I wakened this morning, clear and sudden as an electric flash. If David Weatherbee was mentally unbalanced when he made that transfer, the last half interest in the Aurora mine ought to revert to her."

Feversham started. He lifted his plump hands and let them drop forcibly on his broad knees. But she did not notice his surprise. They were approaching the station, and time pressed. "You know it is not a simple infatuation with Frederic," she hurried on, "to be forgotten tomorrow. He has loved her passionately from the day he first met her, four years ago. He can't think of anything else; he never will do anything of credit to the family until she is his wife. And now, with David Weatherbee safely buried, it seems reasonably sure. Still, still, Miles, this unexpected fortune held out to her just now might turn the scales. We have got to keep it from her, and if those coal claims are coming up for trial, you must frame some excuse to have them postponed."

"Postponed? Why, we've just succeeded in gaining Federal attention. We've been waiting five years. We want them settled now. It concerns Frederic as well as the rest of us."

"True," she answered, "even more. If those patents are allowed, he will take immediate steps to mine the coal on a large scale. And it came over me, instantly, on the heels of the first flash, that it was inevitable, if Mr. Tisdale had taken advantage of David Weatherbee's condition — and his own story shows the man had lost his mind; he was wandering around planting make-believe orchards in the snow — you would use the point to impeach the Government's star witness."

“Impeach the Government’s witness?” repeated Fever-sham, then a sudden intelligence leaped into his face. “Impeach Hollis Tisdale,” he added softly and laughed.

Presently, as the chauffeur slackened speed, looking for a stand among the waiting machines at the depot, the attorney said: “If the syndicate sends Stuart Foster north to the Iditarod, he may be forced to winter there; that would certainly postpone the trial until spring.”

The next moment the chauffeur threw open the limousine door, and the delegate stepped out; but he lingered a little over his good-by, retaining his wife’s hand, which he continued to shake slowly, while his eyes telegraphed an answer to the question in hers. Then, laughing again deeply, he said: “My lady! My lady! Nature juggled; she played your brother Frederic a trick when she set that mind in your woman’s head.”

CHAPTER III

FOSTER TOO

THE apartment Tisdale called home was in a high corner of the Alaska building, where the western windows, overtopping other stone and brick blocks of the business center, commanded the harbor, caught like a faceted jewel between Duwamish Head and Magnolia Bluff, and a far sweep of the outer Sound set in wooded islands and the lofty snow peaks of the Olympic peninsula. Next to his summer camp in the open he liked this eyrie, and particularly he liked it at this hour of the night tide. He drew his chair forward where the stiff, salt wind blew full in his face, but Foster, who had found the elevator not running and was somewhat heated by his long climb to the "summit," took the precaution of choosing a sheltered place near the north window, which was closed. A shaded electric lamp cast a ring of light on the package he had laid on the table between them, but the rest of the room was in shadow, and from his seat he glanced down on the iridescent sign displays of Second Avenue, then followed the lines of street globes trailing away to the brilliant constellations set against the blackness of Queen Anne hill.

"She is to be out of town a week," he said, "and I hardly liked to leave Weatherbee's things with a hotel clerk; since I am sailing on the *Admiral Sampson* to-night, I brought the package back. You will have to be your own messenger."

"That's all right, Foster; I can find another when she returns. I'll ask Banks."

"No." Foster's glance came back from the street; his voice rang a little sharp. "Take it yourself, Hollis."

"I can trust it with Banks." Tisdale paused a moment, still looking out on the harbor lights and the stars, then said: "So you are going north again; back to the copper mine, I presume?"

"No, I shall be there later, but I expect to make a quick trip in to the Iditarod now, to look over placer properties. The syndicate has bonded Banks' claims and, if it is feasible, a dredger will be sent in next spring to begin operations on a big scale. I shall go, of course, by way of the Yukon, and if ice comes early and the steamers are taken off, return by trail around through Fairbanks."

"I see." Tisdale leaned forward a little, grasping the arms of his chair. "The syndicate is taking considerable risk in sending you to the Iditarod at this time. Suppose those coal cases should be called, with you winter-bound up there. Why, the Chugach trial couldn't go on."

"I am identified with the Morganstein interests there, I admit; but why should the Chugach claims be classed with conspiracies to defraud the Government? They were entered regularly, fifty coal claims of one hundred and sixty acres each, by as many different persons. Because the President temporarily suspended Alaska coal laws is no reason those patents should be refused or even delayed. Our money was accepted by the Government; it was never refunded."

"As I thought," said Tisdale softly, addressing the stars; "as I feared." Then, "Foster, Foster," he admonished, "be careful. Keep your head. That syndicate is going to worry you some, old man, before you are through."

Foster got to his feet. "See here, Hollis, be fair. Look at it once from the other side. The Morgansteins have done more for Alaska than they will ever be given credit

for. Capital is the one key to open that big, new, mountain-locked country, and the Government is treating it like a boa-constrictor to be throttled and stamped out. Millions went into the development of the El Dorado, yet they still have to ship the ore thousands of miles to a smelter, with coal,—the best kind, inexhaustible fields of it,—at our door. And go back to McFarlane. He put one hundred and fifty thousand into the Chugach Railway to bring out the coal he had mined, but he can't touch it; it's all tied up in red tape; the road is rotting away. He is getting to be an old man, but I saw him doing day labor on the Seattle streets to-day. Then there's the Copper River Northwestern. That company built a railroad where every engineer but one, who saw the conditions, said it could not be done. You yourself have called it the most wonderful piece of construction on record. You know how that big bridge was built in winter—the only time when the bergs stopped chipping off the face of the glacier long enough to set the piers; you know how Haney worked his men, racing against the spring thaw—he's paying for it with his life, now, down in California. In dollars that bridge alone cost a million and a half. Yet, with this road finished through the coast mountains, they've had to suspend operation because they can't burn their own coal. They've got to change their locomotives to oil burners. And all this is just because the President delays to annul a temporary restriction the previous executive neglected to remove. We have waited; we have imported from British Columbia, from Japan; shipped in Pennsylvania, laid down at Prince William Sound at fifteen dollars a ton, when our own coal could be mined for two and a quarter and delivered here in Seattle for five."

"It could, I grant that," said Tisdale mellowly, "but would it, Stuart? Would it, if the Morganstein interests had exclusive control?"

Foster seemed not to have heard that question. He turned restlessly and strode across the room. "The Government with just as much reason might have conserved Alaska gold."

Tisdale laughed. "That would have been a good thing for Alaska," he answered; "if a part, at least of her placer streams had been conserved. Come, Foster, you know as well as I do that the regulations early prospectors accepted as laws are not respected to-day. Every discovery is followed by speculators who travel light, who do not expect to do even first assessment work, but only to stay on the ground long enough to stake as many claims as possible for themselves and their friends. When the real prospector arrives, with his year's outfit, he finds hundreds of miles, a whole valley staked, and his one chance is to buy or work under a lease. Most of these speculators live in the towns, some of them down here in Seattle, carrying on other business, and they never visit their claims. They re-stake and re-stake year after year and follow on the heels of each new strike, often by proxy. We have proof enough of all this to convince the most lukewarm senator."

"You think then," said Foster quickly, "there is going to be a chance, after all, for the bill for Home Rule?"

"No." Tisdale's voice lost its mellowness. "It is a mistake; it's asking too much at the beginning. We need amended mining laws; we should work for that at once, in the quickest concerted way. And, first of all, our special delegates should push the necessity of a law giving a defined length of shaft or tunnel for assessment work, as is enforced in the Klondike, and ask for efficient inspectors to see that such laws as we have are obeyed."

Foster moved to the window and stood looking down again on the city lights. Presently he said: "I presume you will see the President while you are in Washington."

"Probably. He is always interested in the field work up there, and this season's reconnaissance in the Matanuska coal district should be of special importance to him just now. The need of a naval coaling station on the Pacific coast has grown imperative, and with vast bodies of coal accessible to Prince William Sound, the question of location should soon be solved."

There was another silence, while Foster walked again to the end of the room and returned. "How soon do you start east?" he asked.

"Within a week. Meantime, I am going over the Cascades into the sage-brush country to look up that land of Weatherbee's."

"You intend then," said Foster quickly, "to take that piece of desert off Mrs. Weatherbee's hands?"

"Perhaps. It depends on the possibility of carrying out his project. I have just shipped a steam thawing apparatus in to the Aurora, and that, with supplies for a winter camp, has taken a good deal of ready money. Freight runs high, whether it's from the Iditarod or south from Fairbanks. But spring should see expenses paid and my investment back."

"From all I've heard," responded Foster dryly, "you'll get your investment back with interest."

"Of course," said Tisdale after a moment, "Mrs. Weatherbee will be eager to dispose of the tract; the only reason it is still on her hands is that no one has wanted to buy it at any price."

"And that's just why you should." Foster paused, then went on slowly, controlling the emotion in his voice, "You don't know her, Hollis. She's proud. She won't admit the situation, and I can't ask her directly, but I am sure she has come to the limit. I've been trying all day, ever since I knew I must go north again, to raise enough money to make an offer for that land, but practically all I

have is tied up in Alaska properties. It takes time to find a customer, and the banks are cautious."

Tisdale rose from his chair. "Foster!" he cried and stretched out his hands. "Foster — not you, too."

Then his hands dropped, and Foster drew a step nearer into the circle of light and stood meeting squarely the silent remonstrance, accusation, censure, for which he was prepared. "I knew how you would take it," he broke out at last, "but it's the truth. I've smothered it, kept it down for years; but it's nothing to be ashamed of any longer. I'd have been glad to exchange places with Weatherbee. I'd have counted it a privilege to work, even as he did, for her; I could have suffered privation, the worst kind, wrung success out of failure, for the hope of her."

"See here, Foster,"—Tisdale laid his hands on the younger man's shoulders, shaking him slowly,—“you must stop this.” His hold relaxed; he stepped back, and his voice vibrated softly through the room. “How could you have said it, knowing David Weatherbee as you did? No matter what kind of a woman she is, you should have remembered she was his wife and respected her for his sake.”

“Respect? I do respect her. She’s the kind of woman a man sets on a pedestal to worship and glorify. You don’t understand it, Hollis; you don’t know her, and I can’t explain; but just her presence is an appeal, an inspiration to all that’s worth anything in me.”

Tisdale’s hands sought his pockets; his head dropped forward a little and he stood regarding Foster with an upward look from under frowning brows.

“You don’t know her,” Foster repeated. “She’s different — finer than other women. And she has been gently bred. Generations of the best blood is bottled like old wine in her crystal body.” He paused, his face brighten-

ing at the fancy. "You can always see the spirit sparkling through."

"I remember about that blue blood," Tisdale said tersely. "Weatherbee told me how it could be traced back through a Spanish mother to some buccaneering adventurer, Don Silva de y somebody, who made his headquarters in Mexico. And that means a trace of Mexican in the race, or at least Aztec."

Foster colored. "The son of that Don Silva came north and settled in California. He brought his peons with him and made a great rancheria. At the time of the Mexican War, his herds and flocks covered immense ranges. Hundreds of these cattle must have supplied the United States commissary; the rest were scattered, and in the end there was little left of the estate; just a few hundred acres and a battered hacienda. But Mrs. Weatherbee's father was English; the younger son of an old and knighted family."

"I know," answered Tisdale dryly. "Here in the northwest we call such sons remittance men. They are paid generous allowances, sometimes, to come to America and stay."

"That's unfair," Foster flamed. "You have no right to say it. He came to California when he was just a young fellow to invest a small inheritance. He doubled it twice in a few years. Then he was persuaded to put his money in an old, low-grade gold mine. The company made improvements, built a flume thirty miles long to bring water to the property for development, but it was hardly finished when a State law was passed prohibiting hydraulic mining. It practically ruined him. He had nothing to depend on then but a small annuity."

"Meantime," supplemented Tisdale, "he had married his Spanish señorita and her inheritance, the old rancheria, was sunk with his own in the gold mine. Then he began to

play fast and loose with his annuity at the San Francisco stock exchange."

"He hoped to make good quickly. He was getting past his prime, with his daughter's future to be secured. But it got to be a habit and, after the death of his wife, a passion. His figure was well known on the street; he was called a plunger. Some days he made fortunes; the next lost them. Still he was the same distinguished, courteous gentleman to the end."

"And that came on the stock exchange, after a prolonged strain. David Weatherbee found him and took him home." Tisdale paused, then went on, still regarding Foster with that upward look from under his forbidding brows. "It fell to Weatherbee to break the news to the daughter, and ten days later, on the eve of his sailing north to Seattle, that marriage was hurried through."

There was a silent moment, then Foster said: "Weatherbee loved her, and he was going to Alaska; it was uncertain when he could return; married, he might send for her when conditions were fit. And her father's affairs were a complete wreck; even the annuity stopped at his death, and there wasn't an acre of her mother's inheritance left. Not a relative to take her in."

"I know; that is why she married Weatherbee." Tisdale set his lips grimly; he swung around and strode across the floor. "You see, you can't tell me anything," he said. "I know all about it. Wait. Listen. I am going over the mountains and look up that land of Weatherbee's, and I shall probably buy it, but I want you to understand clearly it is only because I hope to carry his project through. Now go north, Foster; take a new grip on things; get to work and let your investments alone."

After that, when Foster had gone, Tisdale spent a long interval tramping the floor of his breezy room. The furrows still divided his brows, his mouth was set, and a dark

color burned and glowed through his tan. But deeper than his angry solicitude for Foster rankled his resentment against this woman. Who was she, he asked himself, that she should fix her hold on level-headed Foster? But he knew her kind. Feversham had called her a "typical American beauty," but there were many types, and he knew her kind. She was a brunette, of course, showing a swarthier trace of Mexican with the Spanish, and she would have a sort of personal magnetism. She might prove dramatic if roused, but those Spanish-California women were indolent, and they grew heavy early. Big, handsome, voluptuous; just a splendid animal without a spark of soul.

He had stopped near the table, and his glance fell on the package in the ring of light from the shaded lamp. After a moment he lifted it and, drawing up a chair, seated himself and removed the wrapper. It covered a tin box such as he was accustomed to use in the wilderness for the protection and portage of field notes and maps. He raised the lid and took from the top a heavy paper, which he unfolded and spread before him. It was Weatherbee's landscape plan, traced with the skill of a draughtsman and showing plainly the contour of the tract in eastern Washington and his method of reclamation. The land included a deep pocket set between spurs of the Cascade Mountains. The ridges and peaks above it had an altitude of from one to six thousand feet. He found the spring, marked high in a depressed shoulder, and followed the line of flume drawn from it down to a natural dry basin at the top of the pocket. A dam was set in the lower rim of this reservoir and, reaching from it, a canal was sketched in, feeding cross ditches, distributing spillways to the orchards that covered the slopes and levels below. Finally he traced the roadway up through the avenues between the trees, over the bench, to the house that commanded the valley. The

mission walls, the inside court, the roomy, vine-grown portico, all the detail of foliage here had been elaborated skilfully, with the touch of an artist. The habitation stood out the central feature of the picture and, as a good etching will, assumed a certain personality.

How fond David would have been of a home,— a home and children! Tisdale folded the plan and sat holding it absently in his hands. His mind ran back from this final, elaborated copy to the first rough draft Weatherbee had shown him one night at the beginning of that interminable winter they had passed together in the Alaska solitudes. He had watched the drawing and the project grow. But afterwards, when he had taken up geological work again, they had met only at long intervals; at times he had lost all trace of Weatherbee, and he had not realized the scheme had such a hold. Still, he should have understood; he should have had at least a suspicion before that letter reached him at Nome. And even then he had been blind. With that written proof in his hands, he had failed to grasp its meaning. The tragedy! the shame of it! That he should have hesitated,— thrown away four days.

He looked off once more to the harbor, and his eyes gathered their far-sighted expression, as though they went seeking that white trail through the solitudes stretching limitless under the cold Arctic night. His face hardened. When finally the features stirred, disturbed by forces far down, he had come to that make-believe orchard of spruce twigs.

After a while he folded the drawing to put it away, but as his glance fell on the contents of the box, he laid the plan on the table to take up the miner's poke tucked in a corner made by a packet of letters, and drew out Weatherbee's watch. It was valuable but the large monogram deeply engraved on the gold case may have made it un-

negotiable. That probably was why David never had parted with it. Tisdale wound it, and set the hands. The action seemed suddenly to bring Weatherbee close. He felt his splendid personality there beside him, as he used to feel it still nights up under the near Yukon stars. It was as though he was back to one night, the last on a long trail, when they were about to part company. He had been urging him to come out with him to the States, but Weatherbee had as steadily refused. "Not yet," he persisted. "Not until I have something to show." And again: "No, Hollis, don't ask me to throw away all these years. I have the experience now, and I've got to make good." Then he spoke of his wife—for an instant Tisdale seemed to see him once more, bending to hold his open watch so that the light of the camp-fire played on her picture set in the lower rim. "You see Alaska is no place for a woman like her," he said, "but she is worth waiting for and working for. You ought to understand, Hollis, how the thought of her buoys me through."

But it was a long time to remember a picture seen only by the flicker of a camp-fire and starshine, and the woman of Tisdale's imagination clouded out the face he tried to recall. "Still Weatherbee was so sensitive, so fine," he argued with himself. "A woman must have possessed more than a beautiful body to have become the center of his life. She must, at the start, have possessed some capacity of feeling."

He put his thumb on the spring to open the lower case, but the image so clearly fixed in his mind stayed the impulse. "What is the use?" he exclaimed, and thrusting the watch back into the bag, quickly tied the string. "I don't want to see you. I don't want to know you," and he added, pushing the poke into its place and closing the box: "The facts are all against you."

CHAPTER IV

SNOQUALMIE PASS AND A BROKEN AXLE

TISDALE leaned forward in his seat in the observation car. His rugged features worked a little, and his eyes had their far-sighted gaze. Scarred buttes crowded the track; great firs, clinging with exposed roots to the bluffs, leaned in menace, and above the timber belt granite pyramids and fingers shone amethyst against the sky; then a giant door closed on this vestibule of the Pass, and he was in an amphitheatre of lofty peaks. The eastbound began to wind and lift like a leviathan seeking a way through. It crept along a tilting shelf, rounded a sheer spur, and ran shrieking over a succession of trestles, while the noise of the exhausts rang a continuous challenge from shoulder and crag. Then suddenly a mighty summit built like a pulpit of the gods closed behind, and a company of still higher mountains encircled the gorge. Everywhere above the wooded slopes towered castellated heights and spires.

Presently a near cliff came between him and the higher view and, with a lift and drop of his square shoulders, he settled back in his chair. He drew his hand across his eyes, the humorous lines deepened and, like one admitting a weakness, he shook his head. It was always so; the sight of any mountains, a patch of snow on a far blue ridge, set his pulses singing; wakened the wanderlust for the big spaces in God's out-of-doors. And this canyon of the Snoqualmie was old, familiar ground. He had served his surveyor's apprenticeship on these western slopes of the Cascades. He had triangulated most of these peaks,

named some of them, and he had carried a transit to these headwaters, following his axman often over a new trail. Now, far, far down between the columns of hemlock and fir, he caught glimpses of the State road on the opposite bank of the stream that, like a lost river, went forever seeking a way out, and finally, for an instant he saw a cabin set like a toy house at the wooden bridge where the thoroughfare crossed. Then the eastbound, having made a great loop, found another hidden gateway and moved up to the levels above Lake Keechelus. The whistle signalled a mountain station, and Tisdale rose and went out to the platform; when the trucks jolted to a standstill, he swung himself down to the ground to enjoy a breath of the fine air.

The next moment he found himself almost upon a wrecked automobile. He saw in a flash that the road, coming through a cut, crossed the railroad track, and that in making a quick turn to avoid the end of the slowing train, the chauffeur had forced the car into the bank. The machine was still upright, but it listed forward on a broken axle. A young woman who had kept her seat in the tonneau was nursing a painful wrist, while two girls, who evidently had come through the accident unscathed, were trying to help the only man of the party up from the ground. Tisdale bent to give him the support of his shoulder, and, groaning, the stranger settled against the side of his car and into a sitting position on the edge of the floor, easing an injured leg. He had also received an ugly hurt above his brows, which were heavy and black and met in an angle over a prominent nose.

The lady in the tonneau and one of the girls had the same marked features and the same brilliant dark eyes, though the retreating chin, which in the man amounted to almost a blemish, in them was modified. But the last one in the party, whom Tisdale had noticed first, was not

like the rest. She was not like any one in the world he had seen before. From the hem of her light gray motor-ing coat to the crown of her big hat, she was a delight to the eyes. The veil that tied the hat down framed a face full of a piquant yet delicate charm. She was watching the man huddled against the machine, and her mouth, parted a little, showed the upper lip short with the upward curves of a bow. It was as though words were arrested, half spoken, and her eyes, shadowy under curling dark lashes, held their expression, uncertain whether to sparkle out or to cloud.

After a moment the man lifted his head and, meeting her look, smiled. "I'm all right," he said, "only I've wrenched this knee; sprained it, I guess. And my head feels like a drum."

"Oh, I am — glad" — her voice fluctuated softly, but the sparkle broke in her eyes — "that it isn't worse. Would you like a glass of ice-water from the train? A porter is coming and the conductor, too. I will ask for anything."

He smiled again. "You'll get it, if you do. But what I want most just now is a glass of that port. Elizabeth," and his glance moved to the other girl, "where did you put that hamper?"

Elizabeth, followed by the porter, hurried around to the other side of the automobile to find the basket, and Tisdale moved a few steps away, waiting to see if he could be of further service.

A passenger with a camera and an alert, inquiring face had come down from the day coach. He wound the film key and focussed for a closer exposure, but no one noticed him. At that moment all interest centered on the man who was hurt. "Well," said the conductor at last, having looked the group and the situation over, "what's the trouble?"

"Looks like a broken axle, doesn't it? And possibly a broken leg." He groaned and repeated aggressively: "A broken axle. With the worst of Snoqualmie Pass before us, and not a garage or a repair shop within fifty miles."

"You are in a fix, sure. But this train will take you through the Pass to Ellensburg, and there ought to be a hospital and a garage there. Or—the westbound passenger, due at this siding in seven minutes"—the conductor looked at his watch—"could put you back in Seattle at eight-fifteen."

"Make it the westbound; no hospital for me. Telegraph for a drawing-room, conductor, and notify this station agent to ship the machine on the same train. And, Elizabeth," he paused to take the drinking-cup she had filled, "you look up a telephone, or if there isn't a long distance, telegraph James. Tell him to have a couple of doctors, Hillis and Norton, to meet the eight-fifteen; and to bring the limousine down with plenty of pillows and comforters." He drained the cup and dropped it into the open hamper. "Now, porter," he added, "if you hurry up a cocktail, the right sort, before that westbound gets here, it means a five to you."

As these various messengers scurried away, the girl who remained picked up the cup and poured a draught of wine for the lady in the tonneau. "I am so sorry, but it was the only way. Do you think it is a sprain?" she asked.

"Yes." The older woman took the cup in her left hand. She had a deep, carrying voice, and she added, looking at the injured wrist: "It's swelling frightfully, but it saved my face; I might have had just such a hideous wound as Frederic's. Isn't it a relief to hear him talking so rationally?"

The girl nodded. "He seems quite himself," she said gravely. But she turned to cover the mirth in her eyes; it suffused her face, her whole charming personality.

Then suddenly, at the moment the flow was highest, came the ebb. Her glance met Tisdale's clear, appraising look, and she stood silent and aloof.

He looked away and, after a moment, seeing nothing further to do, started back to his train. She turned to take the empty cup, and as she closed the hamper the whistle of the westbound sounded through the gorge.

Tisdale walked on through the observation car to the rear platform and stood looking absently off through an aisle of Alpine firs that, parklike, bordered the track. It was a long time since the sight of a pretty woman had so quickened his blood. He had believed that for him this sort of thing was over, and he laughed at himself a little.

The westbound rumbled to a stop on the parallel track, he felt the trucks under him start, and an unaccountable depression came over him; the next moment he heard a soft voice directing the porter behind him, and as unaccountably his heart rose. The girl came on through the open door and stopped beside him, bracing herself with one hand on the railing, while she waved her handkerchief to the group she had left. He caught a faint, clean perfume suggesting violets, the wind lifted the end of her veil across his shoulder, and something of her exhilaration was transmitted to the currents in his veins. "Good-by, Elizabeth," she called. "Good-by. Good-by."

Some trainmen were getting the injured man aboard the westbound passenger, and the lady who had left the wrecked automobile to go with him sent back a sonorous "Au revoir." But Elizabeth, who was hurrying down from the station where she had accomplished her errand, turned in astonishment to look after the speeding east-bound. Then a rocky knob closed all this from sight.

The girl on the platform turned, and Tisdale moved a little to let her pass. At the same time the lurching of the car, as it swung to the curve, threw her against him.

It all happened very quickly; he steadied her with his arm, and she drew back in confusion; he raised his hand to his head and, remembering he had left his hat in his seat, a flush shaded through his tan. Then, "I beg your pardon," she said and hurried by him through the door.

Tisdale stood smoothing his wind-ruffled hair and watching the receding cliff. "Her eyes are hazel," he thought, "with turquoise lights. I never heard of such a combination, but — it's fine."

A little later, when he went in to take his seat, he found her in the chair across the aisle. The train was skirting the bluffs of Keechelus then, and she had taken off her coat and hat and sat watching the unfolding lake. His side glance swept her slender, gray-clad figure to the toe of one trim shoe, braced lightly on her footstool, and returned to her face. In profile it was a new delight. One caught the upward curl of her black lashes; the suggestion of a fault in the tip of her high, yet delicately chiseled nose; the piquant curve of her short upper lip; the full contour of the lifted chin. Her hair, roughened some, was soft and fine and black with bluish tones.

The temptation to watch her was very great, and Tisdale squared his shoulders resolutely and swung his chair more towards his own window, which did not afford a view of the lake. He wanted to see this new railroad route through the Cascades. This Pass of Snoqualmie had always been his choice of a transcontinental line. And he was approaching new territory; he never had pushed down the eastern side from the divide. He had chosen this roundabout way purposely, with thirty miles of horseback at the end, when the Great Northern would have put him directly into the Wenatchee Valley and within a few miles of that tract of Weatherbee's he was going to see.

There were few travelers in the observation car, and for a while nothing broke the silence but the clomp and rush of the wheels on the down-grade, then the man with a camera entered and came down the aisle as far as the new passenger's chair. "I hope you'll excuse me," he said, "I'm Daniels, representing the *Seattle Press*, and I thought you would like to see this story go in straight."

Tisdale swung his chair a little towards the open rear door, so that he was able to watch without seeming to see the progress of the comedy. He was quick enough to catch the sweeping look she gave the intruder, aloof yet fearless, as though she saw him across an invisible barrier. "You mean you are a reporter," she asked quietly, "and are writing an account of the accident for your newspaper?"

"Yes." Daniels dropped his cap into the next chair and seated himself airily on the arm. The camera swung by a carrying strap from his shoulder, and he opened a notebook, which he supported on his knee while he felt in his pocket for a pencil. "Of course I recognized young Morganstein; everybody knows him and that chocolate car; he's been run in so often for speeding about town. And I suppose he was touring through Snoqualmie Pass to the races at North Yakima fair. There should be some horses there worth going to see."

"We meant to spend a day or two at the fair," she admitted, "but we expected to motor on, exploring a little in the neighborhood."

"I see. Up the valley to have a look at the big irrigation dam the Government is putting in and maybe on to see the great Tieton bore. That would have been a fine trip; sorry you missed it." Daniels paused to place several dots and hooks on his page. "I recognized Miss Morganstein, too," he went on, "though she was too busy to notice me. I met her when I was taking my

course in journalism at the State University ; danced with her at the Junior Prom. And the other lady, whose wrist was sprained, must have been her sister, Mrs. Feversham. I was detailed to interview the new Alaska delegate when he passed through Seattle, and I understood his wife was to join him later. She was stopping over for a visit, and the society editor called my attention to a mighty good picture of her in last Sunday's issue. Do you know? —" he paused, looking into the girl's face with a curious scrutiny, "there was another fine reproduction on that page that you might have posed for. The lady served tea or punch or did something at the same affair. But I can't remember her name — I've tried ever since we left that station — though seems to me it was a married one."

"I remember the picture you mean ; I remember. And I was there. It was a bridge-luncheon at the Country Club in honor of Mrs. Feversham. And she — the lady you were reminded of — won the prize. So you think I resemble that photograph?" She tipped her head back a little, holding his glance with her half-veiled eyes. "What an imagination!"

"Of course if you did pose for that picture, it doesn't do you half justice ; I admit that. But" — regarding her with a wavering doubt — "I guess I've been jumping at conclusions again. They call me the 'Novelist' at the office." He paused, laughing off a momentary embarrassment. "That's why I didn't want to depend on getting your name from the society editor."

"I am glad you did not. It would have been very annoying, I'm sure — to the lady. I suppose," she went on slowly, while the glamour grew in her eyes, "I suppose nothing could induce you to keep this story out of the *Press*."

He pursed his lips and shook his head decidedly. "I

don't see how I can. I'd do 'most anything to oblige you, but this is the biggest scoop I ever fell into. The fellows detailed by the other papers to report the fair went straight through by way of the Northern Pacific. I was the only reporter at the wreck."

"I understand, but," her voice fluctuated softly, "I dislike publicity so intensely. Of course it's different with Mrs. Feversham. She is accustomed to newspaper notice; her husband and brother are so completely in the public eye. But since you must use the story, couldn't you suppress my name?"

"Oh, but how could I? The whole story hinges on you. You were driving the machine. I saw you from the train window as you came through the cut. You handled the gear like an imported chauffeur, but it was steep there on the approach, and the car began to skid. I saw in a flash what was going to happen; it made me limp as a rag. But there was a chance,—the merest hairbreadth, and you took it." He waited a moment, then said, smiling: "That was a picture worth snapping, but I was too batty to think of it in time. You see," he went on seriously, "the leading character in this story is you. And it means a lot to me. I was going to be fired; honest I was. The old man told me he wasn't looking for any *Treasure Island* genius; what his paper needed was plain facts. Then his big heart got the upper hand, and he called me back. 'Jimmie,' he said, 'there's good stuff in you, and I am going to give you one more trial. Go over to North Yakima and tell us about the fair. Take the new Milwaukee line as far as Ellensburg and pick up something about the automobile road through Snoqualmie Pass. But remember, cut out the fiction; keep to facts!'"

"I understand," she repeated gravely, "I understand. The accident came opportunely. It was life and color to your setting and demonstrates the need of a better road.

The most I can hope is that you will not exaggerate or — or put us in a ridiculous light.”

“I swear to that.” He settled his notebook again on his knee and lifted his pencil. “Nothing sensational,” he added, “nothing annoying; now please give me your name.”

“Well, then, write Miss Armitage.”

“Miss Armitage. Thank you. Miss Armitage of?”

“San Francisco.”

“Of San Francisco; and visiting the Morgansteins, of course. But going on now alone to meet the friends who are expecting you — am I right? — at North Yakima.”

There was a brief silence, and she moved a little in her chair. “Where I am going now,” she said, and looked at him once more across the invisible barrier, “is another story.”

“I beg your pardon.” Daniels laughed and, rising from his perch on the chair arm, put his notebook in his pocket. “And I’m awfully grateful. If ever I can be of service to you, I hope you’ll let me know.” He started up the car, then paused to say over his shoulder: “The light for photography was fine; the old man will double column every illustration.”

“Illustrations?” She started up in dismay. “Oh, no. Please — I couldn’t endure —”

But Jimmie Daniels, with the camera swinging to his quick step, hurried on to the vestibule.

She settled back in her seat, and for a moment her consternation grew; then the humor of the situation must have dawned on her, for suddenly the sparkles danced in her eyes. Her glance met Tisdale’s briefly and, suppress it as he tried, his own smile broke at the corners of his mouth. He rose and walked out again to the platform.

This was the rarest woman on earth. She was able to appreciate a joke at her own expense. Clearly she had

finessed, then, in the instant she had been sure of the game, she had met and accepted defeat with a smile. But he would like to discipline that fellow Daniels;—here he frowned—those films should be destroyed. Still, the boy would hardly give them up peaceably and to take them otherwise would not spare her the publicity she so desired to avoid; such a scene must simply furnish fresh material, a new chapter to the story. After all, not one newspaper cut in a hundred could be recognized. It was certain she was in no need of a champion; he never had seen a woman so well equipped, so sure of herself and her weapons, and yet so altogether feminine. If Foster had but known *her*.

Instantly, in sharp contrast to this delightful stranger, rose the woman of his imagination; the idle spendthrift who had cast her spell over level-headed Foster; who had wrecked David Weatherbee; and his face hardened. A personal interview, he told himself presently, would be worse than useless. There was no way to reach a woman like her; she was past appeal. But he would take that tract of desert off her hands at her price, and perhaps, while the money lasted, she would let Foster alone.

The train had left Lake Keechelus and was racing easily down the banks of the Yakima. He was entering the country he had desired to see, and soon his interest wakened. He seated himself to watch the heights that seemed to move in quick succession like the endlessly closing gates of the Pass. The track still ran shelf-wise along precipitous knobs and ridges; sometimes it bored through. The forests of fir and hemlock were replaced by thinning groves of pine; then appeared the first bare, sage-mottled dune. The trucks rumbled over a bit of trestle, and for an instant he saw the intake of an irrigating canal, and finally, after a last tunnel, the eastbound steamed out of the canyon into a broad, mountain-locked plateau. Every-

where, watered by the brimming ditch, stretched fields of vivid alfalfa or ripe grain. Where the harvesting was over, herds of fine horses and cattle or great flocks of sheep were turned in to browse on the stubble. At rare intervals a sage-grown breadth of unreclaimed land, like a ragged blemish, divided these farms. Then, when the arid slopes began to crowd again, the train whistled Ellensburg on the lower rim of the plain.

Tisdale left his seat to lean over the railing and look ahead. He was in time to catch a fleeting glimpse of Jimmie Daniels as he hurried out of the telegraph office and sprang on the step of a starting bus. It was here the young newspaper man was to transfer to the Northern Pacific, and doubtless the girl too was changing trains. The Milwaukee, beyond Ellensburg, passed through new, unbroken country for many miles; the stations were all in embryo, and even though she may not have resumed her journey at the Pass with the intention of stopping off at the fair, the same bus was probably taking her over to the old, main traveled route down the Yakima to the Columbia.

Again that unaccountable depression came over him. He tried to throw it off, laughing at himself a little and lighting a cigar. This pretty woman had happened in his path like a flower; she had pleased his eyes for a few hours and was gone. But what possible difference could her coming and going make to him?

The train started, and he settled back in his seat. The fertile fields were left behind, then presently the eastbound steamed through a gap in a sun-baked ridge and entered a great arid level. Sage-brush stretched limitless, and the dull green of each bush, powdered with dust, made a grayer blotch on the pale shifting soil, that every chance zephyr lifted in swirls and scattered like ashes. Sometimes a whiter patch showed where alkali streaked through. It was like coming into an old, worn-out world. The sun

burned pitilessly, and when finally the train had crossed this plain and began to wind through lofty dunes, the heat pent between the slopes became stifling. The rear platform was growing intolerable, and he knew his station could not be far off. He rose to go in, but the eastbound suddenly plunged into the coolness of a tunnel, and he waited while it bored through to daylight and moved on along a shelf overlooking a dry run. Then, as he turned to the open door, he saw the girl had not taken the Northern Pacific at Ellensburg. She was still there in the observation car.

Her eyes were closed, and he noticed as he went forward that her breast rose and fell gently; the shorter, loose hair formed damp, cool little rings on her forehead and about her ears. She was sleeping in her chair. But a turn in the track brought the sun streaming through her window; the polished ceiling reflected the glare, and he stopped to reach carefully and draw the blind. A moment later the whistle shrieked, and the conductor called his station. He hurried on up the aisle and, finding his satchel in the vestibule, stood waiting until the car jolted to a stop, then swung himself off. But the porter followed with a suitcase and placed his stool, and the next instant the girl appeared. She carried her hat in her hands, her coat was tucked under her arm, and as she stepped down beside Tisdale, the bell began to ring, the porter sprang aboard, and the train went speeding ahead.

The station was only a telegraph office, flanked by a water-tank on a siding. There was no waiting hotel bus, no cab, no vehicle of any kind. The small building rose like an islet out of a gray sea. Far off through billowing swells one other islet appeared, but these two passengers the eastbound had left were like a man and woman marooned.

CHAPTER V

APPLES OF EDEN

TISDALE stood looking after the train while the girl's swift, startled glance swept the billowing desert and with growing dismay searched the draw below the station. "There isn't a town in sight!" she exclaimed, and her lip trembled. "Not a taxi or even a stage!" And she added, moving and lifting her eyes to meet his: "What am I to do?"

"I'll do my best, madam," he paused, and the genial lines broke lightly in his face, "but I could find out quicker if I knew where you want to go."

"To Wenatchee. And I tho — ought — I understood — the conductor told me you were going there, and this was your stop. It was his first trip over the new Milwaukee, and we trusted — to you."

Tisdale pursed his lips, shaking his head slowly. "I guess I am responsible. I did tell that conductor I was going to Wenatchee when I asked him to drop me at this siding, but I should have explained I expected to find a saddle-horse here and take a cut-off to strike the Ellensburg road. It should save an hour." He drew a Government map of the quadrangle of that section from his pocket and opened it. "You see, your stop was Ellensburg; the only through road starts there." He found the thoroughfare and began to trace it with his forefinger. "It crosses rugged country; follows the canyons through these spurs of the Cascades. They push down sheer to the Columbia. See the big bend it makes, flowing south

for miles along the mountains trying to find a way out to the Pacific. "The river ought to be off there." He paused and swung on his heel to look eastward. "It isn't far from this station. But even if we reached it, it would be up-stream, against a succession of rapids, from here to Wenatchee. A boat would be impossible." He folded the plat and put it away, then asked abruptly: "Do you ride, madam?"

She gave him a swift side-glance and looked off in the direction of the hidden Columbia. "Sometimes — but I haven't a riding habit."

Tisdale waited. The humor deepened a little at the corners of his mouth. There was but one passenger train each way daily on the newly opened Milwaukee road, and plainly she could not remain at this siding alone all night; yet she was debating the propriety of riding through the mountains to Wenatchee with him. Then unexpectedly the click of a telegraph cut the stillness, and a sudden brightness leaped in her face. "A station master," she cried; "perhaps there's a telephone." And she hurried up the platform to the open office door.

Tisdale slowly followed.

The station master, having transmitted his message, swung around on his stool, and got to his feet in astonishment on seeing the girl.

"I have made a mistake," she said, with a wavering glance over the interior, "and I tho — ought, I hoped there was a telephone. But you can communicate with the nearest garage for me, can you not? Or a stable — or — somewhere. You see," and for an instant the coquetry of a pretty woman who knows she is pretty beamed in her eyes, "I really must have a taxicab or some kind of a carriage to take me back to Ellensburg."

The station master, who was a very young man, answered her smile and, reaching to take a coat from a peg

on the wall, hastily slipped it on. "Of course I could call up Ellensburg," he said; "that's the nearest for a machine. But it belongs to the doctor, and even if he was in town and could spare it, it would take till dark to bring it down. It's a mean road over sandhills for thirty-five miles."

"It is hardly farther than that to Wenatchee," said Tisdale quietly. "With good saddle-horses we should be able to make it as soon. Do you know anything about the trail through to tap the Ellensburg-Wenatchee highway?"

The station master came around the end of his desk. "So you are going to Wenatchee," he exclaimed, and his face shone with a sort of inner glow. "I guess then you must have heard about Hesperides Vale; the air's full of it, and while land is selling next to nothing you want to get in on the ground floor. Yes, sir," his voice quickened, "I own property over there, and I came that way, up the mountain road, in the spring to take this position when the Milwaukee opened. But I don't know much about your cut-off; I just kept on to Ellensburg and dropped down by train from there. The main road, though, was in pretty good shape. It's the old stage road that used to connect with the Northern Pacific, and they had to do some mighty heavy hauling over it while the mountain division of the Great Northern was building up the Wenatchee. It keeps an easy grade, following the canyons up and up till it's six thousand feet at the divide, then you begin to drop to the Columbia. And when you leave the woods, it's like this again, bunch grass and sage, sand and alkali, for twenty miles. Of course there isn't a regular stage now; you have to hire."

"Any road-houses?" asked Tisdale briefly.

"No, but you come across a ranch once in awhile, and any of them would take a man in over night — or a lady."

Tisdale turned to the door. "I can find saddle-horses, I presume, at that ranch off there through the draw. Is it the nearest?"

"The nearest and the only one." The station master walked on with him to the platform. "It's a new place. They are working two teams, every day and Sunday, while daylight lasts, grubbing out the sage-brush for planting. It's a pumping layout to bring water from the Columbia, and they are starting with forty acres all in apples."

"But they have saddle-horses?" said Tisdale, frowning.

"I can't tell you that. The fellow I talked with came over for freight and used one of the teams. Said they couldn't spare it. But that's your only chance. I don't know of any other horses in twenty miles, unless it's a wild band that passed this morning. They stopped down the draw, nosing out the bunch grass for an hour or two, then skidooed."

Tisdale paused a thoughtful moment then asked: "When is the next freight due on this siding?"

"Two-forty-five. And say"—he slapped his knee at the sudden thought—"that's your chance, sure. I have orders to hold them for the eastbound silk train, and they'll let you ride in the caboose up to Kittitas. That's the stop this side of Ellensburg, and there's a livery there, with a cross-road to strike the Ellensburg-Wenatchee. But, say! If you do drop off at Kittitas, ask Lighter to show you the colts. They are the star team in three counties. Took the prize at North Yakima last year for three-year-olds. They're too fly for livery work, but if you can drive, and Lighter likes your looks"—the station master gave Tisdale a careful scrutiny—"and you have his price, I shouldn't wonder if you could hire Nip and Tuck."

Tisdale laughed. "I see. If I can't hire them, I may

be allowed the privilege to buy them. But," and he looked at his watch, "there's time to try that ranch."

He started down the platform then stopped to look back at the girl who had followed a few steps from the threshold. Her eyes held their expression of uncertainty whether to sparkle or to cloud, and he read the arrested question on her lips. "If there are any saddle-horses," he answered, "I will have them here before that two-forty-five freight arrives, but," and he smiled, "I am not so sure I can supply the proper riding-suit. And the most I hope for in saddles is just a small Mexican."

"A Mexican is easy riding," she said, "on a mountain road." But she stood watching him, with the uncertainty still clouding her face, while he moved down the draw.

He wore the suit of gray corduroy it was his habit to wear in open country, with leggings of russet leather, and he traveled very swiftly, with a long, easy stride, though never rapidly enough to wholly escape the dust he disturbed. Once he stopped and bent to fasten a loose strap, and then he took off his coat, which he folded to carry. The pall of dust enveloped him. In it his actions gathered mystery, and his big frame loomed indistinctly like the figure of a genii in a column of smoke. The fancy must have occurred to the watcher on the platform, for it was then the sparkles broke in her eyes, and she said aloud, softly clapping her hands: "I wish — I wish it to be Nip and Tuck."

"So do I." She started and turned, and the station master smiled. "They're beauties, you can take my word. It would be the drive of your life."

He carried his office chair around the corner of the building to place for her in the shade. Then his instrument called him, and for an interval she was left alone. The desert stretched before her, limitless, in the glare of the afternoon sun. If the Columbia flowed in that neigh-

borhood, it was hidden by sand dunes and decomposing cliffs of granite. There was no glimpse of water anywhere, not a green blade; even the bunch grass, that grew sparsely between the sage-brush through the draw, was dry and gray. For a while no sound but the click of the telegraph disturbed the great silence, then a hot wind came wailing out of the solitudes and passed into a fastness of the mountains.

Finally the station master returned. "Well," he said genially, "how are you making it? Lonesome, I guess."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "how can you, how could any human being, live in this dead, worn-out world?"

"It is desolate now," he admitted, sending a thoughtful glance over the arid waste; "it must seem like the Great Sahara to you, coming into it for the first time and directly from the Puget Sound country. I remember how I felt when I struck the Hesperides. Why, it looked like the front door of Hades to me; I said so, and I called myself all kinds of a fool. But I had sunk an even thousand dollars in a twenty-acre tract; bought it off a real estate map over in Seattle, without seeing the ground." He laughed, half in embarrassment at the confession, and moved to take a more comfortable position against the wall. "I was in a railroad office in Chicago," he explained, "and my father expected me to work up to the responsible position he held with the company and take it when he was through. But the western fever caught me; I wanted to come to Washington and grow with the country. He couldn't talk me out of it; so he gave me that thousand dollars and told me to go and to stay till I made good."

"Oh," she cried, "how hard! How miserable! And you?"

"Why, I stayed. There wasn't anything else to do. And after I looked around the valley a little and saw the

Peshastin ditch and what it could do, I got busy. I found work; did anything that turned up and saved like a miser, until I was able to have the land cleared of sagebrush. It has mean roots, you know, sprawling in all directions like the branches. Then I saved to make connections with the ditch and to buy trees. I set the whole twenty acres to apples — I always did like a good apple, and I had sized up the few home orchards around Wenatchee — then I put in alfalfa for a filler, and that eased things, and I settled down to office work, small pay, lots of time to plan, and waited for my trees to grow. That was four years ago, five since I struck the Wenatchee valley, and this season they came into bearing. Now, at the end of this month, I am giving up my position with the Milwaukee, cutting railroading for good, to go over and superintend the harvesting. And say "— he stood erect, the inner glow illumined his face — "I've had an offer for my crop; three hundred and fifty dollars an acre for the fruit on the trees. Three hundred and fifty dollars for a four-year-old orchard! Think of that! Seven thousand clear for re-investment."

"How splendid!" she said, and in that instant her face seemed to catch and reflect his enthusiasm. "To have waited, fought like that in the face of defeat, and to have made good."

"And it's only the beginning," his voice caught a little; "an apple orchard has bigger results every year after maturity. There's a man over there on the Wenatchee who is going to make a thousand dollar profit on each acre of his twelve-year orchard. You ought to see those trees, all braced up with scaffolding, only fourteen acres of them, but every branch loaded. But that orchard is an exception; they had to lift water from the river with buckets and a wheel, and most of the pioneers put in grain. Their eyes are just beginning to open. But think

of Hesperides Vale in another five years. And think what that High Line ditch means. Just imagine it! Water, all you can use and running to waste; water spilling over in this sage-brush desert. Doesn't it spell oasis? Think of it! Grass and flowers and shade in place of this sun-baked sand and alkali."

"It sounds like a fairy tale," she said. "I can hardly believe it."

"I'll show you." He hurried around to the office door and came back directly with a basket of fruit. "Here are a few samples from my trees. Did you ever see pink like that in a bellflower? Isn't it pretty enough for a girl's cheek? And say," he held up an exceedingly large apple, nearer the size of a small pumpkin, "how's this for a Rome Beauty? An agent who is selling acreage for a company down the Yakima offered me five dollars for that apple yesterday. He wanted it for a window display over at his Seattle office. But look at these Jonathans." His sensitive fingers touched the fruit lingeringly with a sort of caress, and the glow deepened in his face. "They represent the main crop. And talk about color! Did you ever see wine and scarlet and gold blend and shade nicer than this?"

She shook her head. "Unless it was in a Puget Sound cloud effect at sunset. That is what it reminds me of; a handful of Puget Sound sunset."

The station master laughed softly. "That's about it, sure. Now taste one and tell me what the flavor of a Wenatchee Jonathan is like. No, that's not quite ripe; try this."

She set her small white teeth in the crimson cheek and tested the flavor deliberately, with the gravity of an epicure, while the boy watched her, his whole nervous frame keyed by her responsiveness to high pitch. "It's like nothing else in the world," she said finally. "No, wait,

yes, it is. It's like condensed wine; a blend of the best; golden Angelica, red port, amber champagne, with just enough of old-fashioned cider to remind you it is an apple."

The station master laughed again. "Say, but you've got it all in, fine." He set the basket at her feet and stood looking down at her an uncertain moment. "I would like awfully well to send you a box," he added, and the flush of his bellflower was reflected in his cheek.

She gave him a swift upward glance and turned her face to the desert. "Thank you, but when one is traveling, it is hard to give a certain address." In the pause that followed, she glanced again and smiled. "I would like one or two of these samples, though, if you can spare them," she compromised; "I shall be thirsty on that mountain road."

"I can spare all you'll take."

"Thank you," she repeated hastily. "And you may be sure I shall look for your orchard when I reach Wenatchee. The fruit on the trees must be beautiful."

"It is. It's worth the drive up from Wenatchee just to see Hesperides Vale, and that special Eden of mine is the core. You couldn't miss it; about ten miles up and right on the river road."

"I shall find it," she nodded brightly. "I am going that way to see a wild tract in a certain pocket of the valley. I wonder"—she started and turned a little to give him her direct look—"if by any possibility it could be brought under your Peshastin ditch?"

He shook his head. "Hardly. I wouldn't count on it. Most of those pockets back in the benches are too high. Some of them are cut off by ridges from one to six thousand feet. Maybe your agent will talk of pumping water from the canal, but don't you bite. It means an expensive electric plant and several miles of private flume.

And perhaps he will show you how easy it's going to be to tap the new High Line that's building down the Wenatchee and on to the plateau across the Columbia thirty miles. But it's a big proposition to finance; in places they'll have to bore through granite cliffs; and if the day ever comes when it's finished far enough to benefit your tract, I doubt the water would reach your upper levels. And say, what is the use of letting him talk you into buying a roof garden when, for one or two hundred dollars an acre, you can still get in on the ground floor?"

She did not answer. Her eyes were turned again to the desert, and a sudden weariness clouded her face. In that moment she seemed older, and the strong light brought out two lines delicately traced at the corners of her beautiful mouth that had not been apparent before.

"But, say," the young man went on eagerly, "let me tell you a little more about the Vale. It's sheltered in there. The mountains wall it in, and you don't get the fierce winds off the Columbia desert. The snow never drifts; it lies flat as a carpet all winter. And we don't have late frosts; never have to stay up all night watching smudge pots to keep the trees warm. And those steep slopes catch the early spring sun and cast it off like big reflectors; things start to grow before winter is gone. And I don't know what makes it so, but the soil on those low Wenatchee benches is a little different from any other. It looks like the Almighty made his hot beds there, all smooth and level, and just forgot to turn the water on. And take a project like the Peshastin, run by a strong company with plenty of capital; the man along the canal only has to pay his water rate, so much an irrigated acre; nothing towards the plant, nothing for flume construction and repairs. And, say, I don't want to bore you, I don't want to influence you too far, but I hate to see a woman — a lady — throw her money away right in sight of a

sure proposition; even if you can't go into improved orchards, any Hesperides investment is safe. It means at least double the price to you within two years. I've bonded forty acres more of wild land joining my tract, and I shall plant thirty of it in the fall. The last ten will be cleared and reserved for speculation. The piece comes within a stone's throw of the Great Northern's tracks. There's a siding there now, and when the Vale comes into full bearing, they are bound to make it a shipping station. Then I'm going to plat that strip into town lots and put it on the market." He paused while her glance, returning from the desert, met his in a veiled side-look, and the flush of the bellflower again tinged his cheek. "I mean," he added, "I'd be mighty glad to let you in."

The blue sparkles played under her lashes. "Thank you, it sounds like riches, but —"

She stopped, leaving the excuse unsaid. The station master had turned his face suddenly towards the Columbia; he was not listening to her. Then, presently, the sound that had caught his alert ear reached her own faintly. Somewhere out in the solitudes a train had whistled. "The westbound freight!" she exclaimed softly. "Isn't it the westbound freight?"

He nodded. "She's signalling Beverley. They'll call me in a minute." And he started around to the office door.

She rose and followed to the corner to look for Tisdale. Midway the road doubled a knoll and was lost, to reappear, a paler streak, on the gray slope where the ranch house stood; and it was there, at the turn, she first noticed a cloud of dust. It advanced rapidly, but for a while she was not able to determine whether it enveloped a rider or a man on foot; she was certain there was no led horse. Then a gust of wind parted the cloud an instant, and the

sparkle suffused her whole face. He was returning as she had hoped, afoot.

She stood watching the moving cloud; the man's bulk began to detach from it and gathered shape. Between pauses, the click of the telegraph reached her, then suddenly the shriek of the whistle cut the stillness. The train must have crossed the Columbia and was winding up through the dunes. She went along the platform and picked up her hat, which she had left on the suitcase with her coat. While she pinned it on and tied her veil over it, the freight signalled twice. It was so close she caught the echo of the thundering trucks from some rocky cut. When the call sounded a third time, it brought an answer from the silk special, far off in the direction of Ellensburg. She lifted her coat and turned again to watch Tisdale. He had quickened his pace, but a shade of suspense subdued the light in her face.

Since the whistle of the special, the telegraph instrument had remained silent, and presently she heard the station master's step behind her. "Well," he said, "it's Nip and Tuck, sure. But say, he can sprint some. Does it easy, too, like one of those cross-country fellows out of a college team. I'd back him against the freight."

"If he misses it," and the suspense crept into her voice, "I must go without him, and I suppose I can be sure of a hotel at Ellensburg?"

"You'll find fair accommodations at Kittitas. But he isn't going to miss the freight, and it will be hours saved to you if Lighter lets you have the colts."

She lifted her coat, and he held it while she slipped her arms in the sleeves. "I've 'most forgotten how to do this," he said; "it's so long since I've seen a girl — or a lady. I'm afraid I've bored you a lot, but you don't know how I've enjoyed it. It's been an epoch seeing you in this wilderness."

“It’s been very interesting to me, I’m sure,” she replied gravely. “I’ve learned so much. I wonder if, should I come this way again, I would find all this desert blossoming?”

“I shouldn’t be surprised; settlement’s bound to follow a new railroad. But say, look into Hesperides Vale while you are at Wenatchee, and if my proposition seems good to you at one hundred dollars an acre, and that is what I’m paying, drop me a line. My name is Bailey. Henderson Bailey, Post-Office, Wenatchee, after the end of the month.”

He waited with expectation in his frank brown eyes, but the girl stood obliviously watching Tisdale. He reached the platform and stopped, breathing deep and full, while he shook the dust from his hat. “I am sorry, madam,” he said, “but their only saddle-horse pulled his rope-stake this morning and went off with the wild herd. You will have to take this freight back to Kittitas.”

“How disappointing!” she exclaimed. “And you were forced to tramp back directly through this heat and dust.”

“This is the lightest soil I ever stepped on”—he glanced down over his powdered leggings and shoes; the humor broke gently in his face—“and there’s just one kind deeper,—the Alaska tundra.”

With this he hurried by her to the office. Presently the freight whistled the siding, and Bailey picked up the baggage and went down to make arrangements with the trainmen. The girl followed, and when Tisdale came back, she stood framed in the doorway of the waiting caboose, while a brakeman dusted a chair, which he placed adroitly facing outside, so that she might forget the unmade bunks and greasy stove. “It isn’t much on accommodations,” he said conciliatingly, “but you can have it all to yourselves; as far as you go, it’s your private car.”

The other train thundered into the station and past; the freight began to move, and Tisdale swung himself aboard. Then the station master, remembering the apples at the last moment, ran with the basket, crowned still by the Rome Beauty for which he had refused five dollars, and dropped it as a parting tribute at her feet.

"Thank you! Thank you for everything!" Her soft voice fluted back to Bailey, and she leaned forward a little, raising her hand with a parting salute. "Good-by!"

Then, as she settled back in her chair, her swift side-glance swept Tisdale. It was incredible he had removed so much dust in that brief interval, but plainly, somewhere in that miserable station, he had found water and towels; he had not seemed more fit that morning in the observation car. The hand he laid on the wall as a brace against the rocking of the light caboose was on a level with her eyes, and they rested there. It was a strong, well-made hand, the hand of the capable draughtsman, sensitive yet controlled, and scrupulously cared for. "I hope I pass muster," he said, and the amusement played gently in his face, "for I am going to venture to introduce myself. Possibly you have heard Judge Feversham speak of me. I am Hollis Tisdale — Miss Armitage."

In the instant he hesitated on the name, she gave him another swift upward glance, and he caught a question in her eyes; then the sparkles rose, and she looked off again to the point where the railroad track was lost among the dunes. "Of course I have heard of you," she admitted. "We — Mrs. Feversham — recognized you this morning in Snoqualmie Pass and would have spoken to thank you for your service had you not hurried aboard your train. She has known you by sight and has wished to meet you personally a long time. But I — I — as you must know — I —"

She had turned once more to give him the direct look of

her unveiled eyes, and meeting his her voice failed. The color flamed and went in her face; then, her glance falling to the basket at her feet, she bent and took the largest apple. "Did you ever see such a marvel?" she asked. "It came from that station master's orchard in the Wenatchee valley. He called it a Rome Beauty. Divide it, please; let us see if the flavor is all it promises."

"If it is"—and Tisdale took the apple and felt in his pocket for his knife—"the ground that grew the tree is a bonanza." He waited another moment, watching the changing color in her face, then turned and walked to the upper end of the caboose, where he deliberately selected a stool which he brought forward to the door. Her confusion puzzled him. Had she been about to confess, as he had at first conjectured, that Miss Armitage was an incognito used to satisfy the *Press* reporter and so avoid publicity? It was clear she had thought better of the impulse, and he told himself, as he took the seat beside her and opened his knife, he was to have no more of her confidence than Jimmie Daniels.

CHAPTER VI

NIP AND TUCK

BAILEY was right; the colts were beauties. But at the time Tisdale arrived at the Kittitas stables, Lighter, having decided to drive them to North Yakima, was putting the pair to a smart buggy. They were not for hire at double or treble the usual day rate.

"I want to sell this team," the trader repeated flatly. "I don't want to winter 'em again, and my best chance to show 'em is now, down at the fair. I can keep 'em in good shape, making it in two stages and resting 'em over night on the road, and be there by noon to-morrow."

One of the horses reared, lifting the stable-boy off his feet, and Lighter sprang to take the bit in his powerful grasp. "Steady, Tuck, steady! Whoa, whoa, back now, back, steady, whoa!" The animal stood, frothing a little, his beautiful coat moist, every muscle tense. "See there, now! Ain't he peaceable? Nothing mean under his whole hide; just wants to go. The other one will nip your fingers once in a while, if you don't watch out, but he don't mean anything, either; it's all in fun."

He gave his place to the boy again and stepped back to Tisdale's side, still watching his team, while a second stableman hurried to fasten the traces. "The fact is," he went on, dropping his voice confidentially, "I've got wind of a customer. He's driving through from the Sound to the races in his machine. A friend of mine wired me. Mebbe you know him. It's one of those Morgansteins of Seattle; the young feller. He saw these bays last year

when they took the blue ribbon and said he'd keep an eye on 'em. They were most too fly then for crowded streets and spinning around the boulevard 'mongst the automobiles, but they're pretty well broke now. Steady, Nip, whoa there!"

"But," said Tisdale quietly, "young Morganstein met with an accident this morning in Snoqualmie Pass. An axle was broken, and he was thrown out of his machine. His leg was injured, and he took the train back to Seattle. I happened to be on the eastbound at the siding where it all occurred."

Lighter gave him a skeptical glance between narrowed lids. "Then, if he can't come himself, I guess he'll send his man. He told that friend of mine he counted on having another look at this team."

Tisdale's brows contracted. "See here, I want to drive to Wenatchee; what is the best you can do for me?"

"Why, let's see. My best livery rig is on the Wenatchee road now. One of them High Line fellers hired the outfit with a driver to take him through to the valley. If you'd be'n here when they started, likely they'd be'n glad to accommodate you. And the sorrels is out with a picnic to Nanum canyon. That leaves the roans. They come in half an hour ago. A couple of traveling salesmen had 'em out all the forenoon, and these drummers drive like blue blazes; and it's a mean pull through to Wenatchee. But wait till to-morrow and, with an early start, you can make it all right with the roans. That's the best I can do, unless you want a saddle-horse."

Tisdale walked back to the stalls and, convinced at a glance the jaded roans were impossible for that day, at least, stopped to look over the saddle animals. He saw that there were two promising travelers, but it would be necessary to impress an indifferent third to carry the baggage. Besides, judging from all he had seen, the re-

sources of Kittitas did not include a ready-made lady's habit. He returned and stood another silent moment watching the lithe, impatient bays. Finally his eyes moved to the entrance and down the road to the railroad station where Miss Armitage was waiting. She was seated on a bench near the door. He could distinguish her gray figure in relief against the reddish-brown wall.

Directly he swung around. "What is your price?" he asked.

Lighter's hand dropped from the edge of the buggy seat. He stepped back to the heads of his team. "You get in, Harry," he said. "Drive 'em five or six blocks. Keep your eyes open."

Harry gathered the reins warily and sprang in; Lighter released his hold, then hurried forward to the driveway and stood with Tisdale watching the team. "Ain't they a sight?" he said.

And they were. Their coats shone like satin in the sun; they stepped airily, spurning the dust of Kittitas, and blew the ashen powder from their nostrils; then without warning the splendid span was away.

Tisdale repeated: "What is your price?"

Lighter's shrewd eyes swept his new customer over; it was as though he made an estimate of how much Tisdale could pay. "Five hundred dollars," he said. "Five hundred — if it's spot cash."

"And the outfit?"

"Let me see. Harness is practically new; buggy first-class. I'll make it an even seven hundred for the whole business; outfit and team."

There was a brief silence. As a rule, a man drawing the salary of the Geological Survey does not spend seven hundred dollars lightly. He bridles his impulses to own fine driving-horses until at least he has tried them. And this sum, just at that time, meant something of a drain on

Tisdale's bank account. He knew if he bought the Weatherbee tract and reclaimed it, he must hedge on his personal expenses for a year or two; he had even talked with Banks a little about a loan to open the project and keep it moving until the next season's clean-up, when the Aurora should make good. He stirred, with a quick upward lift of his head, and looked once more in the direction of the station.

The girl rose and began to walk the platform.

Tisdale swung back and met the trader's calculating gaze. "Where is your bank?" he asked.

The business was quickly transacted and, when Lighter and his customer stepped out of the bank, Harry was there, driving the bays slowly up and down the street. In the moment they waited for him to draw up, the trader looked Tisdale over again. "Your easiest way to get this team over to the Sound is to drive through Snoqualmie Pass, the way you came."

"But," said Tisdale, knitting his brows, "I told you I wanted this team to drive to the Wenatchee valley."

"You can't drive on through the Cascades from there and, if you try to ship these colts aboard a Great Northern train, you'll have trouble."

"I shall probably leave them to winter in the valley. Unless"—Tisdale paused, smiling at the afterthought—"I decide to sell them to young Morganstein when I get back to Seattle."

Lighter laughed dryly. "I thought so. I sized you up all right at the start. I says to myself: 'He don't look like a feller to run a bluff,' and I says: 'Young Morganstein ain't the sort to pick up any second-hand outfit,' but I thought all along you was his man."

"I see." The humor played softly in Tisdale's face. "I see. But you thought wrong."

Lighter's lids narrowed again skeptically. "Those let-

ters you showed to identify yourself cinched it. Why, one was signed by his brother-in-law, Miles Feversham, and your draft was on the Seattle National where the Morgans bank. But it's all right; I got my price." He nudged Tisdale slyly and, laughing again, moved to the heads of the team. "Now, sir, watch your chance; they're chain lightning the minute you touch the seat."

Tisdale was ready. At last he felt the tug of the lines in his grasp, the hot wind stung his face, and he was speeding back in the direction of the station. The girl came to the edge of the platform as he approached, and while the solitary man from the freight office caught the first opportunity to store the baggage under the seat, and the second to lift in the basket of samples from Bailey's orchard, she tied her veil more snugly under her chin and stood measuring the team with the sparkles breaking in her eyes. Then she gathered her skirts in one hand and laid the other lightly on the seat.

"Don't try to help me," she said breathlessly. "Just hold them." And the next instant she was up beside him, and her laugh fluted in exhilaration as they whirled away.

Kittitas fell far behind. They were racing directly across the seven miles of level towards a pass in a lofty range that marked the road to Wenatchee. Far to the left lines of poplars showed where the irrigating canals below Ellensburg watered the plain, and on the right the dunes and bluffs of the unseen Columbia broke the horizon. But the girl was watching Tisdale's management of the horses. "What beauties!" she exclaimed. "And Nip and Tuck!" Her lips rippled merriment. "How well named. Wait, be — care — ful — they are going to take that ho-le. Oh, would you mind giving those reins to me?"

"I wish I could." He shook his head, while the amuse-

ment played gently at the corners of his mouth. "I know all about a team of huskies, and it doesn't make much difference what I have under a saddle, but these kittens in harness are rather out of my line."

"Then trust yourself to me; please do. I used to drive just such a pair."

"Oh, but your hands couldn't stand this, and those gloves would be ribbons in half an hour."

"They are heavier than they look; besides, there are the shops at Wenatchee!" As if this settled the matter she said: "But we must change places. Now." She slipped into his seat as he rose, and took the reins dexterously, with a tightening grip, in her hands. "Whoa, whoa, Nip!" Her voice deepened a little. "Steady, Tuck, steady! That's right; be a man."

There was another silent interval while he watched her handling of the team, then, "I did not know there could be a pair in all the world so like Pedro and Don José," she said, and the exhilaration softened in her face. "They were my ponies given me the birthday I was seventeen. A long time ago —" she sighed and flashed him a side-glance, shaking her head — "but I shall never forget. We lived in San Francisco, and my father and I tried them that morning in Golden Gate park. The roads were simply perfect, and the sea beach at low tide was like a hardwood floor. After that we drove for the week-end to Monterey, then through the redwoods to Santa Cruz and everywhere." She paused reminiscently. "Those California hotels are fine. They pride themselves on their orchestras, and wherever we went, we found friends to enjoy the dancing evenings after table d'hôte. That was in the winter, but it was more delightful in the spring. We drove far south then, through Menlo Park and Palo Alto, where the great meadows were vivid with alfalfa, and fields on fields were yellow with poppies or blue with lupine; on and on into

the peach and almond country. I can see those blossoming orchards now; the air was flooded with perfume."

Her glance moved from the horses out over the sage-covered levels, and the contrast must have dropped like a curtain on her picture, for the light in her face died. Tisdale's look followed the road up from the plain and rested on the higher country; his eyes gathered their far-seeing gaze. He had been suddenly reminded of Weatherbee. It was in those California orchards he had spent his early life. He had known that scent of the blossoming almond; those fields of poppies and lupine had been his playground when he was a child. It was at the university at Palo Alto that he had taken his engineering course; and it was at one of those gay hotels, on a holiday and through some fellow student, he had met the woman who had spoiled his life.

The moment passed. One of the horses broke, and instantly the driver was alert. And while she alternately admonished and upbraided, with a firm manipulation of the reins, the humor began to play again in Tisdale's face. They were approaching the point where the road met the highway from Ellensburg, and in the irrigated sections that began to divide the unreclaimed land, harvesters were reaping and binding; from a farther field came the noise of a threshing machine; presently, as the bays turned into the thoroughfare, the way was blocked by a great flock of sheep.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "there must be thousands of them; how can the ones in the center breathe? Whoa, Nip, whoa now! Do you think you are one of those lambs? And there's no chance to go around; it is fenced with barbed wire on both sides; we simply must drive through. No, let me, please. Steady, now, Tuck, steady, whoa."

They had passed the mounted herders, and the colts broke their way playfully, dancing, curveting with bowing

necks, into the midst of the flock. Soon the figures of the advance shepherds loomed through the dust. They were turning the sheep into a harvested field. They rolled in over the yellow stubble like a foaming sea. Far away, outlined like a sail against an island rick, the night tent of these nomads was already pitched.

Tisdale laughed softly. "Well, madam, that was skilful piloting. A bidarka couldn't have been safer riding in a skiddery sea."

"A bidarka?" she questioned, ruffling her brows.

Tisdale nodded. "One of those small skin canoes the Alaskan natives use. And it's touchy as a duck; comes bobbing up here and there, but right-side up every time. And it's frail looking, frail as an eggshell, yet I would stake a bidarka against a lifeboat in a surf. Do you know?"—he went on after a moment—"I would like to see you in one, racing out with the whitecaps up there in Bering Sea; your face all wet with spray, and your hair tucked away in the hood of a gray fox parka. Nothing else would show; the rest of you would be stowed below in a wonderful little water-tight compartment."

"It sounds delightful," she said, and the sparkles broke in her eyes.

After that there was a long silence. The bays fell into an even trot. The mountains loomed near, then before them, on the limits of the plain, a mighty herd of cattle closed the road. The girl rose a little in her place and looked over that moving sea of backs. "We must drive through again," she said. "It's going to be stifling but there's no possible way around. No," she protested, when he would have taken the reins, "I'm able. I learned once, years ago, on a great ranch in southern California. I'd rather." She settled in her seat smiling a little. "It's in the blood."

Tisdale reached and took the whip. They had passed

the drivers and were pushing into the herd. Sometimes a red-eyed brute turned with lowered horns and dripping mouth, then backed slowly out of the way of the team. Sometimes, in a thicker press, an animal wheeled close to the tires and, stemming the current, sounded a protest. But the young horses, less playful now, divided the great herd and came at last safely out of the smother. The road began to lift, as they rounded the first rampart of the range, and Tisdale's glance fell to her hands. "Those gloves are done for, as I expected," he exclaimed. "I'll wager your palms are blistered. Come, own they hurt."

She nodded. "But it was worth it, though you may drive now, if you wish. It's my wrists; they have been so long out of practice. You don't know how they a — che."

"So," he said, when he had taken the reins, "so you are as fond of horses as this."

"Horses like these, yes. I haven't felt as happy and young since I gave up Pedro and Don José."

Tisdale turned a little to look in her face. She had said "young" with the tone of one whose youth is past, yet the most conservative judge could not place her age a day over twenty-five. And she was so buoyant, so vibrant. His pulses quickened. It was as though currents of her vitality were being continually transmitted through his veins.

As they ascended, the plain unfolded like a map below; harvest fields, pastures of feeding cattle or sheep, meadows of alfalfa, unreclaimed reaches of sage-brush, and, far off among her shade-trees, the roofs of Ellensburg reflecting the late sun. Above the opposite range that hemmed the valley southward some thunder-heads crowded fast towards a loftier snow-peak. Far away across the divide, white, symmetrical, wrought of alabaster, inlaid with opal, lifted a peerless dome.

"Mount Rainier!" exclaimed Tisdale.

"I knew it." Her voice vibrated softly. "Even at this distance I knew. It was like seeing unexpectedly, in an unfamiliar country, the head of a noble friend lifting above the crowd."

Tisdale's glance returned to her face. Surprise and understanding shone softly in his own. She turned, and met the look with a smile. It was then, for the first time, he discovered unsounded depths through the subdued lights of her eyes. "You must have known old Rainier intimately," he said.

She shook her head. "Not nearer than Puget Sound. But I have a marvelous view from my hotel windows in Seattle, and often in long summer twilights from the deck of Mr. Morganstein's yacht, I've watched the changing Alpine glow on the mountain. I always draw my south curtains first, at Vivian Court, to see whether the dome is clear or promises a wet day. I've learned a mountain, surely as a person, has individuality; every cloud effect is to me a different mood, and sometimes, when I've been most unhappy or hard-pressed, the sight of Rainier rising so serene, so pure, so high above the fretting clouds, has given me new courage. Can you understand that, Mr. Tisdale? How a mountain can become an influence, an inspiration, in a life?"

"I think so, yes." Tisdale paused, then added quietly: "But I would like to be the first to show you old Rainier at close range."

At this she moved a little; he felt the invisible barrier stiffen between them. "Mr. Morganstein promised to motor us through to the National Park Inn when the new Government road was finished, but we've been waiting for the heavy summer travel to be over. It has been like the road to Mecca since the foot of the mountain has been accessible."

There was a silence, during which Tisdale watched the pulling team. Her manner of reminding him of his position was unmistakable, but it was her frequent reference to young Morganstein that began to nettle him. Why should she wish specially to motor to Rainier with that black-browed, querulous nabob? Why had she so often sailed on his yacht? And why should she ever have been unhappy and hard-pressed, as she had confessed? She who was so clearly created for happiness. But to Tisdale her camaraderie with Nature was charming. It was so very rare. A few of the women he had known hitherto had been capable of it, but they had lived rugged lives; the wilderness gave them little else. And of all the men whom he had made his friends through an eventful career, there was only Foster who sometimes felt the magnitude of high places,—and there had been David Weatherbee. At this thought of Weatherbee his brows clouded, and that last letter, the one that had reached him at Nome and which he still carried in his breast pocket, seemed suddenly to gather a vital quality. It was as though it cried out: “I can’t stand these everlasting ice peaks, Hollis; they crowd me so.”

Miss Armitage sat obliviously looking off once more across the valley. The thunder-heads, denser now and driving in legions along the opposite heights, stormed over the snow peak and assailed the far, shining dome.

“Oh,” she exclaimed, “see Rainier now! That blackest cloud is lifting over the summit. Rain is streaming from it like a veil of gauze; but the dome still shines through like a transfigured face!”

Tisdale’s glance rested a moment on the wonder. His face cleared. “If we were on the other side of the Cascades,” he said, “that weather-cap would mean a storm before many hours; but here, in this country of little rain, I presume it is only a threat.”

The bays began to round a curve and presently Rainier, the lesser heights, all the valley of Kittitas, closed from sight. They had reached the timber belt; poplars threaded the parks of pine, and young growths of fir, like the stiff groves of a toy village, gathered hold on the sharp mountain slopes. Sometimes the voice of a creek, hurrying down the canyon to join the Yakima, broke the stillness, or a desert wind found its way in and went wailing up the water-course. And sometimes in a rocky place, the hoof-beats of the horses, the noise of the wheels, struck an echo from spur to spur. Then Tisdale commenced to whistle cautiously, in fragments at first, with his glance on the playing ears of the colts, until satisfied they rather liked it, he settled into a definite tune, but with the flutelike intonations of one who loves and is accustomed to make his own melody.

He knew that this woman beside him, since they had left the civilization of the valley behind, half repented her adventure. He felt the barrier strengthen to a wall, over which, uncertain, a little afraid, she watched him. At last, having finished the tune, he turned and surprised the covert look from under her curling black lashes.

"I hope," he said, and the amusement broke softly in his face, "all this appraisal is showing a little to my credit."

The color flamed pinkly in her face. She looked away. "I was wondering if you blamed me. I've been so unconservative — so — so — even daring. Is it not true?"

"No, Miss Armitage, I understand how you had to decide, in a moment, to take that eastbound train in Snoqualmie Pass, and that you believed it would be possible to motor or stage across to Wenatchee from the Milwaukee road."

"Yes, but," she persisted, "you think, having learned my mistake, I should have stayed on the freight train as

far as Ellensburg, where I could have waited for the next passenger back to Seattle."

"If you had, you would have disappointed me. That would have completely spoiled my estimate of you."

"Your estimate of me?" she questioned.

"Yes." He paused and his glance moved slowly, a little absently, up the unfolding gorge. "It's a fancy of mine to compare a woman, on sight, with some kind of flower. It may be a lily or a rose or perhaps it's a flaunting tulip. Once, up in the heart of the Alaska forest, it was just a sweet wood anemone." He paused again, looking off through the trees, and a hint of tenderness touched his mouth. "For instance," he went on, and his voice quickened, "there is your friend, Mrs. Feversham. I never have met her, but I've seen her a good many times, and she always reminds me of one of those rich, dark roses florists call Black Prince. And there's her sister, who makes me think of a fine, creamy hyacinth; the sturdy sort, able to stand on its own stem without a prop. And they are exotics, both of them; their personality, wherever they are, has the effect of a strong perfume."

He paused again, so long that this time his listener ventured to prompt him. "And I?" she asked.

"You?" He turned, and the color flushed through his tan. "Why, you are like nothing in the world but a certain Alaska violet I once stumbled on. It was out of season, on a bleak mountainside, where, at the close of a miserable day, I was forced to make camp. A little thing stimulates a man sometimes, and the sight of that flower blooming there when violet time was gone, lifting its head next to a snow-field, nodding so pluckily, holding its own against the bitter wind, buoyed me through a desperate hour."

She turned her face to look down through the treetops at the complaining stream. Presently she said: "That

is better than an estimate; it is a tribute. I wish I might hope to live up to it, but sooner or later," and the vibration played softly in her voice, "I am going to disappoint you."

Tisdale laughed, shaking his head. "My first impressions are the ones that count," he said simply. "But do you want to turn back now?"

"N — o, unless you — do."

Tisdale laughed again mellowly. "Then it's all right. We are going to see this trip through. But I wish I could show you that Alaska mountainside in midsummer. Imagine violets on violets, thousands of them, springing everywhere in the vivid new grass. You can't avoid crushing some, no matter how carefully you pick your steps. There's a rocky seat half-way up on a level spur, where you might rest, and I would fill your lap with those violets, big, long-stemmed ones, till the blue lights danced in your eyes."

They were doing that now, and her laugh fluted softly through the wood. For that moment the barrier between them lost substance; it became the sheerest tissue, a curtain of gauze. Then the aloofness for which he waited settled on her. She looked away, her glance again seeking the stream. "I can't imagine anything more delightful," she said.

A rough and steep breadth of road opened before them, and for a while the bays held his attention, then in a better stretch, he felt her swift side-glance again reading his face. "Do you know," she said, "you are not at all the kind of man I was led to expect."

"No?" He turned interestedly, with the amusement shading the corners of his mouth. "What did you hear?"

"Why, I heard that you were the hardest man in the world to know; the most elusive, shyest."

Tisdale's laugh rang, a low note from the depths of his mellow heart. "And you believed that?"

She nodded, and he caught the blue sparkles under her drooping lids. "You know how Mrs. Feversham has tried her best to know you; how she sent you invitations repeatedly to dinner or for an evening at Juneau, Valdez, Fairbanks, and you invariably made some excuse."

"Oh, but that's easily explained. Summers, when she timed her visits to Alaska, I was busy getting my party into the field. The working season up there is short."

"But winters, at Seattle and in Washington even, it has been the same."

"Winters, why, winters, I have my geological reports to get in shape for the printer; interminable proofs to go over; and there are so many necessary people to meet in connection with my work. Then, too, if the season has been spent in opening country of special interest, I like to prepare a paper for the geographical society; that keeps me in touch with old friends."

"Old friends," she repeated after a moment. "Do you know it was one of them, or rather one of your closest friends, who encouraged my delusion in regard to you?"

"No, how was it?"

"Why, he said you were the hardest man in the world to turn, a man of iron when once you made up your mind, but that Mrs. Feversham was right; you were shy. He had known you to go miles around, on occasion, to avoid a town, just to escape meeting a woman. And he told us — of course I can repeat it since it is so ridiculously untrue — that it was easier to bridle a trapped moose than to lead you to a ballroom; but that once there, no doubt you would gentle fine."

She leaned back in her seat, laughing softly, though it was obviously a joke at her own expense as well as Tis-

dale's. "And I believed it," she added. "I believed it — every word."

Tisdale laughed too, a deep undertone. "That sounds like Billy Foster. I wager it was Foster. Was it?" he asked.

She nodded affirmatively.

"Then Foster has met you." Tisdale's voice rang a little. "He knows you, after all."

"Yes, he could hardly help knowing me. His business interests are with my closest friends, the Morgansteins; they think a great deal of him. And he happens to play a remarkably good hand at bridge; we always depend on him to make up a table when he is in town."

Tisdale's eyes rested a thoughtful moment on the road ahead. Strange Foster never had mentioned her. But that showed how blind, how completely infatuated with the Spanish woman the boy was. His face set austerely. Then suddenly he started; his grasp tightened on the reins so that the colts sprang to the sharp grade. "Do you happen to know that enchantress, too?" he asked.

"Whom?" questioned Miss Armitage.

"I mean Mrs. Weatherbee. I believe she counts the Morgansteins among her friends, and you said you were staying at Vivian Court, where her apartments are."

"Oh, yes, I know — her. I" — the color flamed and went in her face; her glance fell once more to the steep slope, searching out the narrowing stream through the trees. "I — 've known Beatriz Weatherbee all my life. I — I think a great deal of her."

"Madam, madam!" Tisdale protested, "don't tell me that. You have known her, lived near her, perhaps, in California, those years when you were growing up; shared the intimacies young girls enjoy. I understand all that, but don't say you care anything for her now."

Miss Armitage lifted her face. Her eyes did not sparkle

then; they flamed. "Why shouldn't I, Mr. Tisdale? And who are you to disparage Beatriz Weatherbee? You never have known her. What right have you to condemn her?"

"This right, Miss Armitage; she destroyed David Weatherbee. And I know what a life was lost, what a man was sacrificed."

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT ON THE MOUNTAIN ROAD

THEY drove on for a long interval in silence. The colts, sobered by the sharp pull to the divide, kept an even pace now that they had struck the down-grade, and Tisdale's gaze, hard still, uncompromising, remained fixed absently on the winding road. Once, when the woman beside him ventured to look in his face, she drew herself a little more erect and aloof. She must have seen the futility of her effort to defend her friend, and the fire that had flashed in her eyes had as quickly died. It was as though she felt the iron out-cropping in this man and shrank from him baffled, almost afraid. Yet she held her head high, and the delicate lines, etched again at the corners of her mouth, gave it a saving touch of decision or fortitude.

But suddenly Hollis drew the horses in. Miss Armitage caught a great breath. The way was blocked by a fallen pine tree, which, toppling from the bluff they were skirting, had carried down a strip of the road and started an incipient slide. "We can't drive around," he said at last, and the humor broke the grim lines of his mouth. "We've got to go through."

She looked hastily back along the curve, then ahead down the steep mountainside. "We never could turn in this place — but it isn't possible to drive through. Fate is against us."

"Why, I think Fate favored us. She built this barricade, but she left us an open door. I must unhitch, though, to get these kittens through."

As he spoke he put the reins in her hands and, springing out, felt under the seat for the halters. The girl's glance moved swiftly along the tilting pine, searching for that door. The top of the tree, with its debris of branches, rested prone on the slope below the road; but the trunk was supported by a shoulder of the bluff on which it had stood. This left a low and narrow portal under the clean bole between the first thick bough and the wall. "But the buggy!" she exclaimed.

"That's the trouble." Tisdale found one halter as he spoke and reached for the other. "It is getting this trap over that will take time. But I pledge myself to see you through these mountains before dark; and when we strike the levels of the Columbia, these colts are going to make their record."

"You mean we can't hope to reach Wenatchee before dark?" Her voice shook a little. "And there isn't a house in sight — anywhere. Mr. Tisdale, we haven't even seen another traveler on this road."

"Well, this is luck!" He was drawing a coil of new rope from under the seat. "This is luck! Lighter must have meant to picket his horses. Did I tell you he was starting to drive these bays through to the fair at North Yakima? And here is a hatchet — he expected to cut fire-wood — and this looks like his lunch-box. Yes," — and he lifted the lid to glance in — "here are biscuits, sliced ham, all we need. Lighter must have intended to spend a night on the road. And here is that second hitching-strap. Now, we are all right; the outfit is complete."

He took the precaution to tie one of the horses before he commenced to unfasten the traces, and he worked swiftly, dexterously, while the girl watched him, directing him sometimes from her seat in the buggy. Presently he lifted the remaining strap, but before he could snap the hook in the ring, the colt's ears flattened back, and he

gripped Tisdale's hand. Instantly Miss Armitage snatched the whip and was on her feet. "Whoa, Nip," she cried, and cut the vixen lightly between the ears. "Whoa, now, whoa!"

The young horse released his hold and broke forward, with Hollis dragging at the bit. He ducked with the colt under the barrier and, keeping his feet with difficulty, ran hugging the bluff. Rocks, slipping beneath the bay's incautious hoofs, rattled down the steep slope. Finally mastered by that tugging weight, he settled to an unstable pace and so passed the break in the road.

Miss Armitage had left the buggy. She followed to the opening and stood watching Tisdale until, unable to find a safe hitching-place, he turned another bend. The remaining horse pulled at his halter and neighed shrilly for his mate. She went to him. After a moment she untied him and led him through the passage. He followed easily, crowding her sometimes, yet choosing his steps with the caution of a superior animal in a hard situation. Midway over the break in the road, where it was narrowest, he halted with a forefoot on a perilous table of granite, feeling, testing its stability. "That's right, be careful," she admonished, allowing the strap to slacken while she, herself, balanced her weight on the rocking slab. "But it is safe enough — you see. Now, now, Tuck, come on."

But as she started on, Tisdale reappeared at the curve and, waving her hand to reassure him, she took an incautious step. The slab, relieved suddenly of her weight, tilted back and at the same instant caught on its lowered edge the weight of the following horse. He backed off, jerking the halter taut, but she kept her hold, springing again to the surface of the rock. Loose splinters of granite began to clatter down the slope; then, in the moment she paused to gather her equilibrium, she felt Tisdale's arm reaching around to take the strap. "Creep

by me," he said quietly. "No, between me and the bluff, sidewise; there's room." She gained safe ground and stood waiting while he brought the bay across. A last rain of rock struck an answering echo through the gorge.

"What made you?" he asked. "You knew I would hurry back. What made you? handicapped, too, by those skirts and abominable heels."

"I saw you were hurt—the vixen meant to hurt—and I knew I could manage Tuck. I—I thought you might need me."

Her breath was coming hard and quick; her eyes were big and shadowy and, looking into their depths, the light began to play softly in his own. "You thought right," he said. "I am going to."

He turned to lead the horse around to the cleft where he had left his mate. Miss Armitage followed. She regarded his broad back, pursing her lips a little and ruffling her brows. "It is only a bruise," he said presently over his shoulder, "and it served me right. Lighter warned me of that trick."

Nevertheless the handkerchief with which he had wrapped the bruise was showing a red stain, and past the break in the road he changed the halter to his left hand. The hitching-place he had chosen was in a cleft formed by a divided spur of the mountain. It was roofed by the boughs of two pines, and the boles of the trees offered secure hold. She seated herself on a boulder, set benchwise against the rocky wall, and watched him critically while he tied the second horse.

"How pleasant," she said intrepidly; "it is like coming unexpectedly into a room ready furnished in brown and green."

Tisdale turned. "I could make you comfortable in this pocket, if it came to that," he said. "It's sheltered and level as a floor, and I could make you a bed, springy

and fragrant, of boughs; the camp-fire would close the door. And you needn't go hungry with Lighter's lunch and your apples; or thirsty with my drinking-cup to fill down there at the stream."

Even before he finished speaking her brows arched in protest, and he felt the invisible barrier stiffen hard as a wall. "We really must hurry, Mr. Tisdale," she said, rising. "Though it may be impossible to reach Wenatchee to-night, we must find some sort of house. And where there is a house, there must be housekeeping and"—her voice wavered—"a woman."

"Of course," he answered. "And we have at least two hours of daylight left. Don't worry; I am going now to hurry that carriage around."

He had said "of course," but while he went back to the buggy, his mind reviewed the sordid shelters he had found in just such solitudes, where a woman's housekeeping was the exception. Men in communities employed camp cooks, but most prospectors, ranchers, and cattlemen depended on themselves. There had been times when he himself had been forced to make bread. He had learned that first winter he had spent in Alaska with Weatherbee. At the thought of that experimental mixture, he smiled grimly. Then, suddenly, he imagined this gently nurtured woman confronted by a night in such a shack as they had occupied. He saw her waiting expectantly for that impossible chaperon; and, grasping the situation, struggling pluckily to cover her amazement and dismay; he saw himself and Weatherbee nerving each other to offer her that miserable fare. He hoped they would find a housekeeper at the first house on that mountain road, but that lunch of Lighter's gave him a sense of security, like a reserve fund, inadequate, yet something against imminent panic.

Miss Armitage did not return to her seat when he was gone. She fell to pacing the level; to the upper spur and

back; to the lower wall and return; then, finally, it was a few yards further to the bend, to discover what progress Tisdale had made. The buggy was not yet in sight, but the new rope stretched diagonally from beyond the breach in the road to a standing tree on the bluff above her, and he was at work with the hatchet, cutting away an upright bough on the fallen pine. Other broken limbs, gathered from the debris, were piled along the slide to build up the edge. When his branch dropped, he sprang down and dragged it lengthwise to reinforce the rest. Presently he was on the log again, reaching now for the buggy tongue. He set his knee as a brace on the stump of the limb, his muscular body bent, lifted, strained. Then the front wheels rolled up across the bole; he slipped to the ground and grasped the outer one, steadying it down. After a moment, when he had taken in the slack of the line, the remaining tires slowly followed, and he began to ease the vehicle along the patched roadway. The rain of rock was renewed; fragments of granite shifted under the bulkhead of boughs; the buggy heeled lower, lower; then, at the final angle, began to right while the rope strung taut. The narrowest point was passed, and Tisdale stopped a breathing space.

It was characteristic of the man to see the humor of the situation in that moment while he stood wiping the perspiration from his face. Jove, how Foster would enjoy seeing him labor like this for a girl. He imagined the boy sitting up there at some coign of vantage on the bluff, admonishing, advising him dryly, while he laughed in his sleeve. It was undeniably funny. Alone, with one of Lighter's saddle-horses under him, his baggage secured behind the saddle, he might have been threading the dunes of the Columbia now. This incipient slide need not have caused him ten minutes' delay, and eight, nine o'clock at the latest, would have found him putting up for the night

at the hotel in Wenatchee. But here he was hardly over the divide; it was almost sunset, but he was dragging a buggy by hand around a mountain top. He hoped Foster never would find out what he had paid for these bays — the team of huskies that had carried him the long trek from Nome to the Aurora mine and on through Rainy Pass had cost less. Still, under the circumstances, would not Foster himself have done the same? She was no ordinary woman; she was more than pretty, more than attractive; there was no woman like her in all the world. To travel this little journey with her, listen to her, watch her charms unfold, was worth the price. And if it had fallen to Foster, if he were here now to feel the spell of her, that Spanish woman would lose her hold. Then he remembered that Foster knew her; she had admitted that. It was inconceivable, but he had known her at the time he confessed his infatuation for Weatherbee's wife. The amusement went out of Tisdale's face. He bent, frowning, to free the buggy of the rope.

It was then Miss Armitage, exhilarated at his success, hurried forward from the bend. "Oh," she cried radiantly, "how resourceful, how strong you are. It looked simply impossible; I couldn't guess what you meant to do, and now we have only to hitch the team and drive on to Wenatchee. But," she added gravely and shook her head, "it was defying Fate."

He turned, regarding her from under still cloudy brows, though the genial lines began to deepen anew. "I told you Fate was on our side. She threw those boughs there in easy reach. She might as well have said: 'There's some lumber I cut for you; now mend your road.'"

"Perhaps, well, perhaps," the girl laughed softly. "But if Fate had said that to any other man, at least to any man I know, he would not have heard."

But the Columbia was still far off when darkness closed,

and with sunset the thunder-heads they had watched across the Kittitas Valley gathered behind them. It was as though armies encamped on the heights they had left, waiting for night to pass. Then searchlights began to play on the lower country; there was skirmishing along the skyline; blades flashed.

At last, between the lightning flashes, the blackness was so dense it was hardly possible for Tisdale to see the road, and he could not trust the nervous team to keep the track; it was necessary to stop, at least to wait until the moon should rise. But while he was preparing to tell her so, the silence was broken by the barking of a dog. Instantly it was swelled by a deeper baying, and the echo rang a continuous clamor through the gorge. Then a faint illumination brought out in silhouette a final bluff ahead; rounding it, they saw a low-roofed habitation, and in the open door a woman with a lamp.

One of the dogs stood bristling and growling beside her; the other, barking furiously, sprang from the porch so that for a moment Tisdale was busy with the plunging team. Then the woman spoke, and the setter, whimpering, snapping furtively, crept back to her feet.

"We have been delayed by an accident," Tisdale explained briefly, "and I want you to take this lady in for the night. Make her comfortable as possible, and I will see it is worth your while."

"This ain't much of a road-house." The woman held the lamp higher to scrutinize the lady's face. "We only got one room, an' the best I can do is to double up with the kids an' give you my bed."

"That will do very well," answered Tisdale quickly. "I can take care of myself. Of course there's a stable somewhere out here in the dark, and a bale or two of hay."

"No, we got a shed up, but we're short on feed. We're short on 'bout everything: flour, potatoes, bacon, beans.

We've just took up this here claim, an' things ain't growed. But my man's gone down to Wenatchee to fetch a load." Then, seeing this fact was hardly one to solace her transient guests, she laughed shortly and went into the cabin to set the lamp on a table and bring a lantern that hung on the farther wall.

Tisdale turned to help Miss Armitage down. "We may be able to find better accommodations towards the Columbia, when the moon rises," he said, "but I can't be as sure of another — chaperon." Then, looking into her face, he added in his minor key: "I am sorry, but you will make the best of things, I know. And the night will pass. Come."

She slipped down beside him and stood holding her skirts out of the powdery soil, while her wide eyes searched that interior through the open door. Tisdale lifted the baggage from the buggy to the porch, then the woman returned with the lantern and, followed by the dogs, went to show him where he might stable the horses. After a moment Miss Armitage ventured up the low steps to the threshold. It was a portable cabin such as she had noticed from the train window at intervals where construction was incomplete along the new railroad. It was battered and weak, showing old earmarks of transportation, but it was furnished with a rusty cook-stove, some bench chairs, and two beds, which stood in the farther corners and nearly filled that half of the room. A few heavy dishes, the part of a loaf of bread, and several slices of indifferently fried bacon were on the table, between the lamp and a bucket containing a little water. Presently, still holding her skirts, she crossed the grimy floor and stood inspecting with a mingled fascination and dread those ancient beds. Both were destitute of linen, but one was supplied with a tumbled heap of coarse, brown blankets. In the other, beneath a frayed comforter, two small

boys were sleeping. Their sun-baked faces were overhung with thatches of streaked blond hair, and one restless arm, throwing off the sodden cover, partly exposed the child's day attire, an unclean denim blouse tucked into overalls. She turned in sudden panic and hurried back to the porch.

In a little while she noticed her suitcase, opened it, and found her cologne; with this she drenched a fresh handkerchief and began to bathe her face and hands. Then she drew one of the bench chairs through the doorway and, seating herself with her back to the room, kept on dabbing her lips and her cheeks with the cool, delicately pungent perfume, and so gathered up the remnants of her scattered fortitude. Finally, when the lantern glimmered again, and she was able to distinguish the two returning figures, she had laid aside her hat and coat, and she was ready to smile, if not radiantly at least encouragingly, at Tisdale as he came up the steps.

The woman went in to shake out and spread the blankets with a pretence at making the bed, and he followed to the threshold, where he took a swift and closer inventory of the room. Its resources were even more meager than he had supposed. He swung around and looked up through the darkness towards that sheltered cleft they had left near the Pass. He did not say anything, but the girl watching him answered his thought. "I wish it had been possible. It would have been delightful — the ground was like a carpet, clean and soft and fragrant — under those pines."

"I wish we had even had the forethought to bring down an armful of those boughs. But, after all, it might have been worse. At least you need not go hungry, with that lunch of Lighter's and your apples, to say nothing of the sandwiches I asked the steward to make before I left the train. And to-morrow, when you are safe with your

friends at Wenatchee, you are going to forget this miserable experience like an unpleasant dream."

"I am not ungrateful," she said quickly. "I enjoyed every moment of that drive. And besides the apples, I have tea. I always tuck a little in my suitcase when we are touring with Mrs. Feversham, because she uses a different blend."

She bent as she spoke, to find the tea, which she produced together with a small kettle and alcohol burner. Her evident desire to contribute her share, the fine show of courage that accepted and made the best of the inevitable, went straight to Tisdale's heart. "Tea," he repeated mellowly, "tea and all the outfit. Well, that was mighty thoughtful of you. I won't even have to make a fire. But wait a minute; I am going to lift that table out here where it is cooler."

With two seats, there was barely room for it on the porch. Then, while he filled the kettle and lighted the burner, she spread the cloth, a fine damask towel supplied also from her baggage. On the whole it was a rather gay little supper and, considering the limitations of the menu, it bridged a long interval. Tisdale, who had been accustomed to drink tea black and bitter on a hard trail, but habitually refused it socially, tasted his cup with deliberation. "Miss Armitage," he exclaimed, "you can't delude me. Whatever this beverage may be, I am sure it is no ordinary tea."

She was pouring a second cup when his glance fell from her face to her hands. They were delicately made, artistic, with wilful little thumbs, yet they impressed him with a certain resourcefulness, a strength in reserve. Suddenly the light from the lantern which he had hung on a nail in the wall above the table, struck an exceedingly large ruby she wore on her left hand. It glowed blood-red, scintillated, flamed. He saw the stone was mounted

with diamonds in a unique setting of some foreign workmanship, and he told himself it was probably an heirloom; it was too massive, too ornate for a betrothal ring; still he moved uneasily and set the cup down untasted. His eyes returned to her face, questioning, doubting. He was like a musician surprised to detect in a beautiful symphony the first false note.

After that the conversation lagged. It was not cool on the porch. A broadside of lightning sweeping the cabin showed it stood in a narrow valley walled by precipitous, barren slopes and widening gulfwise towards the Columbia desert. The pent air seemed surcharged. It was as though that table was set in a space between running dynamos, and when a stronger flash came, Miss Armitage instinctively grasped her chair, holding herself from contact with an unseen and terrible force. Once, during an interlude, the silence was broken by a strange, faint cry.

"Did you hear?" she asked breathlessly. "What was it?"

Tisdale smiled into her troubled eyes. "Why, just a cougar; lonesome, I guess, and calling his mate. But it's all right. Sounds carry in these mountain gorges, and his cry was picked up by some cross wind miles from here. Look at those dogs! They wouldn't stay curled up there on the ground asleep, too indifferent to prick up an ear, if a cougar, or even a coyote, were near."

Still she was not wholly reassured. She leaned forward, listening, trying to fathom the darkness with a lurking terror in her eyes. At last, when Tisdale rose to say good night, she, too, left her chair. She laid her hand on the edge of the table as though that might steady her voice. "Are you going to the stable?" she asked. "Did you find a possible bed?"

Hollis laughed. "You needn't trouble about me. I

am the sort of fellow to find the soft side of a plank. Yes, it's true. There have been times when I've slept luxuriously on a board, with just my coat rolled up for a pillow."

There was a brief pause while her imagination grasped the thought; then: "You must have been very tired," she said.

"I was," he answered dryly and reached to take the lantern from the wall. At the foot of the steps he halted and put the light down to pick up his bag, which he opened. "Here's a bunch of my handkerchiefs," he said. "They are bigger than yours. They should make you at least a pillow-case. Good night."

The setter rose to follow inquiringly at his heels; the lantern swung gently to his tread and, as his shape disappeared in the gloom, his whistle, sweet, soft, almost tender, fluted back to her. It was the "Good night" from the opera of *Martha*. And Miss Armitage smiled in the face of Fear and turned resolutely to go in.

But the next moment she was back again over the threshold. "Mr. Tisdale!" she called, and the currents held so long in check surged in her voice. "Mr. Tisdale!"

Instantly the lantern swung an arc. He came quickly back to the steps. "Well," he said, breaking the pause, "what is the trouble?"

"I know I must seem foolish — but — please don't go — yet." Her position on the edge of the porch brought her face almost on a level with his. Her eyes in the semi-darkness were luminously big; her face, her whole body, quivered. She leaned a little towards him, and her nearness, the low, vibrant intensity of her voice, set his pulses singing.

"I really can't stay in that room," she explained. "Those beds all but touch, and she, the mother, has crowded in, dressed as she is, to sleep with the children.

There isn't any air to breathe. I — I really can't make myself lie down — there. I had rather spend the night here on the piazza. Only — please wait — until —”

Tisdale laughed his short, mellow note. “You mean you are afraid of the dark, or is it the cougar?”

“It's both and the lightning, too. There! See how it plays along those awful heights; javelins of it; whole broadsides. I know it is foolish, but I can't help feeling it is following me. It singles me out, threatens me as though I am — guilty.”

“Guilty? You? Of what?” Tisdale put down the lantern and came up the steps. “See here, Miss Armitage, come take your chair.” He moved it around from the table and laid his hand on her arm, impelling her into the seat. “Now face it out. Those flashes of heat lightning are about as dangerous as the Aurora Borealis. You ought to know that.”

Then, because the personal contact had set his blood racing, he moved away to the edge of the porch and stood frowning off up the gorge. He knew she covered her face with her hands; he believed she was crying, and he desired beyond all reason to take her to his heart and quiet her. He only said: “But I understand. I have seen strong men just as foolish before an electrical storm, and the bravest woman I ever knew lost her grip one still morning just from solitude.”

There was another silence, then suddenly she lifted her head. “I am sorry,” she said, “but it is all over. I shall try my best not to annoy you any more.”

“Annoy me? Why, you haven't. What makes you think that?” Tisdale turned, and the mellowness stole into his voice. “I didn't expect you to creep in and go to sleep tranquilly alongside that bunch of sage.”

At this she smiled. “You have found a flower to fit even her.”

"I never made a misfit — yet," he answered and waited, looking into her face, reading her through.

"But you have doubts," she supplemented, "and I warned you I should disappoint you. I warned you at the start."

Tisdale laughed again, softly. "The odds were all against that Alaska violet," he said, "but she weathered it through." And seating himself on the steps, he looked up again to the night-enshrouded Pass. The air was cooler; a light wind, drawing down from the divide, brought a hint of dampness; it was raining somewhere, far off. "My doubts are all right," he added, "and I am going to stay here as long as you want me to."

VIII

THE BRAVEST WOMAN HE EVER KNEW

PRESENTLY, during one of the interludes when darkness enveloped the gulf, she began to entertain Tisdale with an experience in the Sierras, a little adventure on one of those journeys with her father, when she had driven Pedro and Don José. But though she told the story with composure, even with a certain vivacity and charm, as she might have narrated it to a small and intimate audience in any safe drawing-room, her self-control was a transparency through which he saw her anxiety manœuvering, in spite of his promise, to keep him there.

"Strange, is it not?" she went on, "how things will take the gloss of humor, looking back. That cloudburst was anything but funny at the time; it was miserably exasperating to stand there drenched, with the comfortable quarters of the mining company in sight, cut off by an impassable washout. And it was wretched driving all those miles to our hotel in wet clothes, with not so much as a dry rug to cover us; yet afterwards, whenever I tried to tell about it, I failed to gain a shred of sympathy. People laughed, as you are doing now."

"And you laughed with them," answered Tisdale quickly, "because looking back you caught the right perspective. It is always so. Another incident that seemed trivial in passing will loom up behind us like a cliff on the horizon. And it is so with people. The man who held the foreground through sheer egoism sinks to his proper place in obscurity, while a little, white-faced woman we knew for a day stands out of the past like a monument."

His brows clouded; he turned from the lantern light to look off again to the shrouded mountain tops. "And looking back," he added, "the man you thought you knew better than the rest, the partner, friend, to whom, when you were reminded and it suited your convenience, you were ready to do a service, stands out from the shadows clearly defined. It is under the test of those high lights behind that his character shines. You wonder at his greatness. His personality takes a stronger, closer hold, and you would give the rest of your life just to go back and travel the old, hard road again with him."

There was a long silence, broken once more by that far, wailing cry on the wind. Miss Armitage started. She laid her hand on Tisdale's shoulder, the nearest object, in a tightening grip, while for a breathless moment she leaned forward, trying to penetrate the darkness of the gorge. The action seemed to remind him of her presence, and he turned to look at her. "Frightened again?" he asked.

Her hand fell; she settled back in her seat. "N-o, not very much, but it took me off guard. It sounds so desolate, so — so — supernatural; like the cry of a doomed soul."

Tisdale smiled. "That describes it, but you never have heard it at close range."

She shivered; her glance moved again in apprehension to the night-enshrouded Pass. "Have you, Mr. Tisdale?"

"Yes, lonesome nights by a mountain camp-fire, with just the wind piping down a ravine, or a cataract breaking over a spur to fill the interlude."

"Oh, that must have been terrifying," and the shiver crept into her voice. "But what did you do?"

"Why, I hurried to pull the embers together and throw on more spruce boughs. A cougar is cautious around a fire."

There was another silence, then, "I was thinking of your little, white-faced woman," said Miss Armitage. "She baffles me. Was she your bravest woman or just your anemone? Would you mind telling me?"

"So you were thinking of her. That's odd; so was I." Tisdale changed his position, turning to lean on the edge of the porch with his elbow resting on the floor. "But it was that Gordon setter there that reminded me of her. Her dog had the same points, though he had been better trained." He paused briefly, then said: "She was both. She was like that small, white flower which grows in the shelter of the Alaska woods — sweet and modest and frail looking — yet she was the bravest woman and the strongest when it came to endurance I ever knew."

"It happened, of course, in Alaska," Miss Armitage ventured, breaking the pause. "You knew her there?"

"Yes, it was in Alaska and about five years ago. The season I gave up getting rich in a hurry and went back to geological work. I had spent the winter on the Tanana with David Weatherbee. We had staked a promising placer, and we were ready to begin sluicing with the first spring thaw, when he sold his interest unexpectedly to meet an obligation down in the States. That nettled me, and I sold out my own share to the same men and accepted a position with the department, who had written to ask me to take charge of a party working above Seward. Weatherbee started with me, but I left him to prospect along the headwaters of the Susitna. My surveys kept me in the neighborhood of Turnagain Arm until midsummer, when I moved camp up the river to the mouth of an unexplored tributary. It was the kind of stream to lure a prospector or a sportsman, clear, rapid, broken by riffles and sand-bars, while the grassy shores looked favorable for elk or caribou. To bridge the delay while the last pack-horses straggled in and the men were busy pitch-

ing tents and putting things into shape, I decided to go on a short hunting trip. I traveled light, with only a single blanket rolled compactly for my shoulder strap, in case the short night should overtake me, with a generous lunch that Sandy, the cook, had supplied, but at the end of two hours' steady tramping I had sighted nothing. I had reached a wooded ravine and a snow-peak, apparently the source of the stream, closed the top of the gorge. It was the heart of the wilderness, over a hundred miles from a settlement and off the track of road-houses, but a few rods on I came upon the flume and dump of a placer mine. The miner's cabin stood a little farther up the bank under a clump of spruce, but the place seemed abandoned. Then I noticed some berry bushes near the sluice had been lately snapped off, where some heavy animal had pushed through, and a moment later, in the moist soil at a small spillway, I picked up the trail of a large bear.

"The tracks led me up the rough path towards the cabin, but midway I came to a fallen tree. It must have been down a week or more, but no attempt had been made to clear the trail or to cut through, so, pushing up over the matted boughs, I leaped from the bole to avoid the litter beyond. At the same instant I saw under me, wedged in the broken branches, the body of my bear. He was a huge grizzly, and must have made an easy and ugly target as he lumbered across the barricade. 'I found one bullet had taken him nearly between the eyes, while another had lodged in the shoulder. And it was plain the shots were aimed from the window, with the rifle probably resting on the sill.

"As I went on up the path, the loud baying of a dog came from the cabin, then a woman's face, young and small and very white, appeared at the window. Seeing me, she turned quickly and threw open the door. The next instant her hand fell to the neck of a fine Gordon

setter and, tugging at his collar, she drew back and stood surveying me from head to foot. 'It's all right, madam,' I said, stopping before her. 'Don't try to hold him. The bear won't trouble you any more. You made a mighty fine shot.'

"'Oh,' she said, and let the dog go, 'I am so glad you have come.' And she sank into a chair, shaking and sobbing."

"You mean," exclaimed Miss Armitage breathlessly, "it was she who killed the bear?"

Tisdale nodded gently. "I wish I could make you understand the situation. She was not a sportswoman. She was city bred and had been carefully reared — accustomed to have things done for her. I saw this at a glance. Only her extremity and the fear that the dog would be hurt nerved her to shoot."

"Oh, I see, I see," said Miss Armitage. "Fate had brought her, left her in that solitary place — alone."

"Fate?" Tisdale questioned. "Well, perhaps, but not maliciously; not in jest. On second thought I would not lay it to Fate at all. You see, she had come voluntarily, willingly, though blindly enough. She was one of the few women who are capable of a great love."

Tisdale waited, but the woman beside him had no more to say. "I saw I must give her time to gather her self-control," he went on, "so I turned my attention to the setter, who was alternately springing on me and excitedly wagging his tail. I like a good dog, and I soon had him familiarly snuffing my pockets; then he stretched himself playfully, with an inquiring, almost human yawn; but suddenly remembering the bear, he stood pointing, head up, forepaw lifted, and made a rush, baying furiously."

"'It's all right, madam,' I repeated and stepped into the room. 'You made a fine shot, and that bearskin is going to make a great rug for your floor.'

"She lifted her face, downing a last sob, and gave me a brave little smile. 'It isn't altogether the bear,' she explained. 'It's partly because I haven't seen any one for so long, and partly because, for a moment, I thought you were my husband. I've been worried about him. He has been gone over three weeks, and he never stayed longer than five days before. But it was a relief to have you come.'

"It sounds differently when I repeat it. You lose the sweet shyness of her face, the appeal in her eyes not yet dry, and that soft minor chord in her voice that reminds me now of a wood-thrush.

"'I understand,' I hurried to say, 'the solitude has grown intolerable. I know what that means. I have lived so long in the eternal stillness sometimes that the first pattering of a rain on the leaves came like the tramp of an army, and the snapping of a twig rang sharp as a pistol shot.'

"'You do understand,' she said. 'You have been through it. And, of course, you see my husband had to leave me. The trail up the canyon is the merest thread. It would have been impossible for me, and I should have only hindered him, now, when every day counts.'

"'You mean,' I said, 'he has left his placer to prospect for the main lode above?' And she answered yes. That every gravel bar made a better showing; the last trip had taken him above the tree line, and this time he expected to prospect along the glacier at the source of the stream. Sometimes erosions laid veins open, and any hour 'he might stumble on riches.' She smiled again, though her lip trembled, then said it was his limited outfit that troubled her most. He had taken only a light blanket and a small allowance of bacon and bread.

"'But,' I reassured her, 'there is almost a certainty he has found game at this season of the year.'

"She looked at the rifle she had set by the window

against the wall. 'I haven't been able to persuade him to take the gun,' she explained, 'for a long time. He doesn't hunt any more.' She stopped, watching me, and locked her slim hands. Then, 'He is greatly changed,' she went on. 'The last time he came home, he hardly noticed me. He spent the whole evening sitting with his eyes fixed on the floor — without a word. And the next morning, before I was awake, he was gone.'

"At last her real fear was clear to me. There is a terrible fascination about those Alaska gold streams. Each gravel bar has just showing enough to lead a man on and on. He hugs the belief from hour to hour he is on the brink of a great find, until he has eyes for nothing but the colors in the sand. He forgets hunger, weariness, everything, and finally, if rescue fails him, he sinks in complete collapse. More than once I had come on such a wreck, straying demented, babbling, all but famished in the hills. And I was sorry for that little woman. I understood the pitch she must have reached to speak so freely to a passing stranger. But it was hard to find just the right thing to say, and while I stood choosing words, she hurried to explain that two days before she had taken the dog and tramped up-stream as far as she had dared, hoping to meet her husband, and that she had intended to go even farther that day, but had been prevented, as I saw, by the bear, who had prowled about the cabin the greater part of the night. The setter's continual barking and growling had failed to drive him away.

"'If you had gone this morning,' I said, 'I should have missed you; then I shouldn't have known about your husband. I am on my way up this canyon, and I shall look for him. And, when I find him, I shall do my best to bring him in touch with the outside world again.'"

Tisdale paused. The abrupt slope that over-topped the portable cabin began to take shape in the darkness. It

had the appearance of a sail looming through fog. Then the shadows scattered, and the belated moon, lifting over the dunes beyond the Columbia, silvered the mouth of the gorge. It was as though that other distant canyon, of which he was thinking, opened before him into unknown solitudes.

Miss Armitage leaned forward, watching his face, waiting for the issue of the story.

“And you found him?” she asked at last.

“Yes. In the end.” Tisdale’s glance returned and, meeting hers, the grim lines in his face relaxed. “But there was a long and rough tramp first. She urged me to take the setter, and I saw the advantage in having a good dog with me on such a search; any cleft, or thicket, or sprinkle of boulders, might easily conceal a man’s body from one passing only a few feet off — but, much as he favored me, he was not to be coaxed far from his mistress; so I suggested she should go, too.

“‘Oh,’ she said, catching at the chance, ‘do you think Jerry can make up for the delay, if I do? I will travel my best, I promise you.’ And she led the way, picking up the faint trail and setting a pace that I knew must soon tire her, while the dog brushed by us, bounding ahead and rushing back and expressing his satisfaction in all sorts of manœuvres.

“In a little while, above the timber — the tree line is low on those Alaska mountainsides — we came to a broad, grassy bog set deep between two spurs, and she was forced to give me the lead. Then the canyon walls grew steeper, lifting into rugged knobs. Sometimes I lost the prospector’s trail in a rock-choked torrent and picked it up again, where it hung like a thin ribbon on a heather-grown slope; but it never wound or doubled if there was foothold ahead. It led up stairs of graywacke, along the brink of slaty cliffs that dropped sheer, hundreds of feet to the

stream below. Still she kept on pluckily, and whenever I turned to help her, I found her there at my elbow, ready. Now and then in breadths of level, where it was possible to walk abreast, we talked a little, but most of the distance was covered in silence. I felt more and more sorry for her. She was so eager, patient, watchful, forever scanning the pitches on either side. And if the setter made a sudden break, scenting a hare perhaps, or starting a ptarmigan, she always stopped, waiting with a light in her face; and when he jogged back to her heels, the expectation settled into patience again.

“Finally we came to a rill where I urged her to rest; and when I had spread my blanket on a boulder, she took the seat, leaning comfortably against a higher rock, and watched me while I opened the tin box in which Sandy had stored my lunch. She told me my cook made a good sandwich and knew how to fry a bird Southern fashion. Then she spoke of the Virginia town where she had lived before her marriage. The trip west had been her wedding journey, and her husband, who was an architect, had intended to open an office in a new town on Puget Sound, but at Seattle he caught the Alaska fever.

“‘The future looked very certain and brilliant then,’ she said, with her smile, ‘but as long as I have my husband, nothing else counts. I could live out my life, be happy here in this wilderness, anywhere, with him. If I could only have him back — as he used to be.’”

Tisdale’s voice softened, vibrating gently, so that the pathos of it all must have impressed the coldest listener. The woman beside him trembled and lifted her hand to her throat.

“I can’t remember all she told me,” he went on, “but her husband had left her in Seattle when he started north, and the next season, when he failed to return for her, she had sailed to Seward in search of him. She had tried to

influence him to give up the placer, when she saw the change in him; at least to go down to one of the coast towns and take up the work for which he had prepared, but he had delayed, with promises, until he was beyond listening to her.

“‘Of course he may stumble on riches any hour, as he believes,’ she said finally, ‘but not all the comforts or luxuries in the world are worth the price.’ She did not break down, as she had in the cabin, but somehow I could hear the tears falling in her voice. I can yet, and see them big and shining deep in her eyes.

“But she was off again, making up the delay, before I could fasten my pack, and when I overtook her in a level stretch and halted a moment to frolic with the dog, her face brightened. Then she spoke of a little trick she had taught him,—to go and meet his master and fetch his hat to her. Sometimes she had hidden it in shrubs, or among rocks, but invariably he had brought it home.

“At last we made a turn and saw the front of the glacier that closed the top of the gorge. The stream gushed from a cavern at the foot, and above the noise of water sounded the grinding and roaring of subterranean forces at work. Once in a while a stone was hurled through. But that is impossible to explain. You must have been on intimate terms with a glacier to grasp the magnitude. Still, try to imagine the ice arching that cave like a bridge and lifting back, rimmed in moraine, far and away to the great white dome. And it was all wrapped in a fine Alpine splendor, so that she stopped beside me in a sort of hushed wonder to look. But I could hear her breath, laboring hard and quick, and she rocked uncertainly on her feet. I laid my hand on her arm to steady her. It was time we turned back. For half an hour I had been gathering courage to tell her so. While I hesitated, allowing her a few minutes to take in the glory, the

setter ran nosing ahead, up over the wreckage along the edge of the glacier, and on across the bridge. I waited until he disappeared in a small pocket, then began: "You know, madam, what all this color means. These twilights linger, and it will be easier traveling down-grade, but we must hurry, to have you home before dark."

"She turned to answer but stopped, looking beyond me to the bridge. Then I saw the setter had caught her attention. He was coming back. His black body moved in strong relief against the ice-field, and I noticed he had something in his mouth. It seemed about the size and color of a grouse,—a ptarmigan, no doubt. Then it flashed over me the thing was a hat. At the same moment I felt her tremble, and I had just time to see that her face had gone white, when she sank against me, a dead weight. I carried her a few yards to a bank of heather and laid her down, and while I was filling my folding cup at the stream, the dog bounded over the rocks and dropped the thing on her breast. It was a hat, a gray felt with a good brim, such as a prospector, or indeed any man who lives in the open, favors; but the setter's actions,—he alternately rushed towards the glacier and back to his mistress, with short yelps,—warned me to be careful, and I tucked the hat out of sight, between two stones. The dog had it out instantly, bent on giving it to her, but I snatched it from him and threw it into the torrent, where it struck upright, floating lightly on the brim, and lodged in a shallow. He followed and came bounding back with it, while I was raising the cup to her lips, and I had barely a chance to crowd it into my blanket roll when she opened her eyes. 'He had Louis' hat,' she said and drifted into unconsciousness again.

"I took my flask from my pocket and, blaming myself for bringing her that hard trip, mixed a draught. It revived her, and in a moment she started up. 'Where is

the hat?' she asked, looking about her. 'Jerry had it on the ice-bridge.'

"At the sound of her voice, the dog, who had been trying to get at the hat, commenced his manœuvres to attract her across the gorge, bounding ahead, calling her with his short, excited barks, and making all the signs of a hunting dog impatient to lead to the quarry. She tried to get to her feet, but I put my hand on her shoulder. 'Wait, madam,' I said. 'You must rest a little longer before you try to start back. You were so tired you fainted. And your eyes must have played you a trick.'

"'You mean,' she began and stopped.

"I am not much of a dissembler, and I found it hard to meet her look, but I answered with all the assurance I could muster. 'I mean, madam, you are mistaken about that hat.'

"She waited a moment, watching the setter, then her glance moved back incredulously to me. 'Then what excites Jerry?' she asked.

"'Why,' I hurried to answer, 'just another bunch of ptarmigan, probably. But while you are resting here, I will go over into that pocket to satisfy him.'

"The setter, content with my company, ran ahead, and I followed him across the ice-bridge. The pocket was thickly strewn with broken rock, but at the upper end there was a clear space grown with heather. And it was there, as I feared, between a bluff and a solitary thumb-shaped boulder that the dog had found his master."

Tisdale paused, looking off again with clouding brows to the stormy heights. Eastward the moon in a clear sky threw a soft illumination on the desert. The cry of the cougar had ceased. The electrical display was less brilliant; it seemed farther off. Miss Armitage moved a little and waited, watching his face.

"But of course," she ventured at last, "you mixed an-

other draught from your emergency flask. The stimulant saved his life."

"No." Tisdale's glance came slowly back. "He was beyond any help. A square of canvas was set obliquely on the glacier side, and that and the blanket which covered him proved the place was his camp; but the only traces of food were a few cracker or bread crumbs in a trap made of twigs, and a marmot skin and a bunch of ptarmigan feathers to show the primitive contrivance had worked. There was no wood in the neighborhood, but the ashes of a small fire showed he must have carried fuel from the belt of spruce half-way down the gorge. If he had made such a trip and not gone on to the cabin, it clearly proved his mental condition. Still in the end there had been a glimmer of light, for he had torn a leaf from his notebook and written first his wife's name and then a line, out of which I was only able to pick the words 'give' and 'help' and 'States.' Evidently he had tried to put the paper into his poke, which had dropped, untied, from his hand with the pencil he had used. The sack was nearly full; it had fallen upright in a fold of the blanket, so only a little of the gold, which was very coarse and rough and bright, had spilled. I made all this inventory almost at a glance, and saw directly he had left his pan and shovel in the gravels of a stream that cascaded over the wall and through the pocket to join the creek below the glacier. Then it came over me that I must keep the truth from her until she was safely back at the cabin, and I put the poke in my pocket and hurried to do what I could.

"The setter hampered me and was frantic when I turned away, alternately following me a few yards, whining and begging, and rushing back to his master. Finally he stopped on the farther side of the ice-bridge and set up a prolonged cry. His mistress had come to meet me and she waited at the crossing, supporting herself with her

hands on a great boulder, shoulders forward, breath hushed, watching me with her soul in her eyes. At last I reached her. 'Madam,' I began, but the words caught in my throat. I turned and looked up at the splendor on the mountain. The air drew sharp across the ice, but a sudden heat swept me; I was wet with perspiration from head to foot. 'Madam,' and I forced myself to meet her eyes, 'it is just as I expected; the dog found — nothing.'

"She straightened herself slowly, still watching me, then suddenly threw her arms against the rock and dropped her face. 'Come,' I said, 'we must start back. Come, I want to hurry through to my camp for a horse.'

"This promise was all she needed to call up her supreme self-control, and she lifted her face with a smile that cut me worse than any tears. 'I'm not ungrateful,' she said, 'but — I felt so sure, from the first, you would find him.'

"'And you felt right,' I hurried to answer. 'Trust me to bring him through.'

"I whistled the setter, and she called repeatedly, but he refused to follow. When we started down the trail, he watched us from his post at the farther end of the ice-bridge, whining and baying, and the moment she stopped at the first turn to look back, he streaked off once more for that pocket. 'Never mind,' I said, and helped her over a rough place, 'Jerry knows he is a good traveler. He will be home before you.' But it was plain to me he would not, and try as I might to hurry her out of range of his cry, it belled again soon, and the cliffs caught it over and over and passed it on to us far down the gorge."

There was one of those speaking silences in which the great heart of the man found expression, and the woman beside him, following his gaze, sifted the cloudy Pass. She seemed in that moment to see that other canyon, stretching down from the glacier, and those two skirting the edge of cliffs, treading broken stairs, pursued by the

cry of the setter into the gathering gloom of the Arctic night.

"It grew very cold in that gorge," he went on, "and I blamed myself for taking her that trip more and more. She never complained, never stopped, except to look back and listen for the dog, but shadows deepened under her eyes; the patient lines seemed chiseled where they had been only lightly drawn, and when she caught me watching her and coaxed up her poor little smile, I could have picked her up in my arms and carried her the rest of the way. But we reached the tree-line before she came to her limit. It was at the turn in a cliff, and I stopped, looking down across the tops of a belt of spruce, to locate the cabin. 'There it is,' I said. 'You see that little brown patch down there in the blur of green. That is your house. You are almost home.'

"She moved a step to see better and stumbled, and she only saved herself by catching my arm in both hands. Then her whole body fell to shaking. I felt unnerved a little, for that matter. It was a dangerous place. I had been recklessly foolish to delay her there. But when I had found a safe seat for her around the cliff, the shivering kept up, chill after chill, and I mixed a draught for her, as I had at the glacier.

"'This will warm your blood,' I said, holding the cup for her. 'Come, madam, we must fight the cold off for another hour; that should see you home. After I have made a good fire, I am going to show you what a fine little supper I can prepare. Bear steaks at this season are prime.'

"I laughed to encourage her, and because the chills were still obstinate, I hurried to unstrap my blanket to wrap around her. And I only remembered the hat when it dropped at her feet. She did not cry out but sat like a marble woman, with her eyes fixed on it. Then, after a while, she bent and lifted it and began to shape it gently

with her numb little fingers. She was beyond tears, and the white stillness of her face made me more helpless than any sobbing. I could think of nothing to say to comfort her and turned away, looking off in the direction of the cabin. It seemed suddenly a long distance off.

"Finally she spoke, slowly at first, convincing herself. 'Jerry did bring it across the ice-bridge. He found Louis and stayed to watch, as I thought. Sir, now tell me the truth.'

"I turned back to her, and it came bluntly enough. Then I explained it was not an accident or anything terrible; that the end had come easily, probably the previous night, of heart failure. 'But I couldn't nerve myself to tell you up there,' I said, 'with all those miles of hard travel before you; and I am going back to-morrow, as I promised, to bring him through.'

"She had nothing to say but rose and held out her hand. In a little while I began to lead her down through the belt of spruce. I moved very slowly, choosing steps, for she paid no attention to her footing. Her hand rested limply in mine, and she stumbled, like one whose light has gone out in a dark place."

Tisdale's story was finished, but Miss Armitage waited, listening. It was as though in the silence she heard his unexpressed thoughts.

"But her life was wrecked," she said at last. "She never could forget. Think of it! The terror of those weeks; the long-drawn suspense. She should not have stayed in Alaska. She should have gone home at the beginning. She was not able to help her husband. Her influence was lost."

"True," Tisdale answered slowly. "Long before that day I found her, she must have known it was a losing fight. But the glory of the battle is not always to the victor. And she blamed herself that she had not gone north with

her husband at the start. You see she loved him, and love with that kind of woman means self-sacrifice; she counted it a privilege to have been there, to have faced the worst with him, done what she could."

Miss Armitage straightened, lifting her head with that movement of a flower shaken on its stem. "Every woman owes it to herself to keep her self-respect," she said. "She owes it to her family — the past and future generations of her race — to make the most of her life."

"And she made the most of hers," responded Tisdale quickly. "That was her crowning year." He hesitated, then said quietly, with his upward look from under slightly frowning brows: "And it was just that reason, the debt to her race, that buoyed her all the way through. It controlled her there at the glacier and gave her strength to turn back, when the setter refused to come. Afterwards, in mid-winter, when news of the birth of her son came down from Seward, I understood."

An emotion like a transparent shadow crossed his listener's face. "That changes everything," she said. "But of course you returned the next day with a horse to do as you promised, and afterwards helped her out to civilization."

"I saw Louis Barbour buried, yes." Tisdale's glance traveled off again to the distant Pass. "We chose a low mound, sheltered by a solitary spruce, between the cabin and the creek, and I inscribed his name and the date on the trunk of the tree. But my time belonged to the Government. I had a party in the field, and the Alaska season is short. It fell to David Weatherbee to see her down to Seward."

"To David Weatherbee?" Miss Armitage started. Protest fluctuated with the surprise in her voice. "But I see, I see!" and she settled back in her seat. "You sent him word. He had known her previously."

"No. When I left him early in the spring, he intended to prospect down the headwaters of the Susitna, you remember, and I was carrying my surveys back from the lower valley. We were working toward each other, and I expected to meet him any day. In fact, I had mail for him at my camp that had come by way of Seward, so I hardly was surprised the next morning, when I made the last turn below the glacier with my horse to see old Weatherbee coming over the ice-bridge.

"He had made a discovery at the source of that little tributary, where the erosion of the glacier had opened a rich vein, and on following the stream through graywackes and slate to the first gravelled fissure, he had found the storage plant for his placer gold. He was on his way out to have the claim recorded and get supplies and mail when he heard the baying setter and, rounding the mouth of the pocket, saw the camp and the dead prospector. Afterwards, when he had talked with the woman waiting down the canyon, he asked to see her husband's poke and compared the gold with the sample he had panned. It was the same, coarse and rough, with little scraps of quartz clinging to the bigger flakes sometimes, and he insisted the strike was Barbour's. He tried to persuade her to make the entry, but she refused, and finally they compromised with a partnership."

"So they were partners." Miss Armitage paused, then went on with a touch of frostiness: "And they traveled those miles of wilderness alone, for days together, out to the coast."

"Yes." Tisdale's glance, coming back, challenged hers. "Sometimes the wilderness enforces a social code of her own. Miss Armitage,"—his voice vibrated softly,—"I wish you had known David Weatherbee. But imagine Sir Galahad, that whitest knight of the whole Round Table, Sir Galahad on that Alaska trail, to-day. And

Weatherbee was doubly anxious to reach Seward. There was a letter from his wife in that packet of mail I gave him. She had written she was taking the opportunity to travel as far as Seward with some friends, who were making the summer tour of the coast. But he was ready to cut the trip into short and easy stages to see Mrs. Barbour through. 'It's all right,' he said at the start. 'Leave it to me. I am going to take this lady to my wife.'"

"And — at Seward?" questioned Miss Armitage, breaking the pause.

"At Seward his wife failed him. But he rented a snug cottage of some people going out to the States and had the good fortune to find a motherly woman, who knew something about nursing, to stay with Mrs. Barbour. It was Christmas when her father arrived from Virginia to help her home, and it was spring before she was able to make the sea voyage as far as Seattle."

"Expenses, in those new, frontier towns, are so impossible; I hope her father was able"—she halted, then added hurriedly, flushing under Tisdale's searching eyes, "but, of course, in any case, he reimbursed Mr. Weatherbee."

"He did, you may be sure, if there was any need. But you have forgotten that poke of Barbour's. There was dust enough to have carried her through even an Alaska winter; but an old Nevada miner, on the strength of that showing, paid her twenty thousand dollars outright for her interest in the claim."

Miss Armitage drew a deep breath. "And David Weatherbee, too? He sold his share — did he not — and stayed on at Seward?"

"Yes, he wasted the best weeks of the season in Seward, waiting for his wife. But she never came. She wrote she had changed her mind. He showed me that letter one night at the close of the season when he stopped at my camp on his way back to the Tanana. It was short but

long enough to remind him there were accounts pressing; one particularly that she called a 'debt of honor.' She hadn't specified, but I guessed directly she had been accepting loans from her friends, and I saw it was that that had worried him. To raise the necessary money, he had been obliged to realize on the new placer. His partner had been waiting to go in to the claim with him, and Weatherbee's sudden offer to sell made the mining man suspicious. He refused to buy at any price. Then David found an old prospector whom he had once befriended and made a deal with him. It was five hundred dollars down, and two thousand out of the first year's clean-up. And he sent all of the ready money to her and started in to make a new stake below Discovery. But the inevitable stampede had followed on the Nevada man's heels, and the strike turned out small.

"It was one of those rich pockets we find sometimes along a glacier that make fortunes for the first men, while the rank and file pan out defeat and disappointment. There was the quartz body above, stringers and veins of it reaching through the graywackes and slate, but to handle it Weatherbee must set up a stamp-mill; and only a line of pack-mules from the Andes, and another line of steamships could transport the ore to the nearest smelter, on Puget Sound. So — he took up the long trek northward again, to the Tanana. Think of it! The irony of it!"

Tisdale rose and turned on the step to look down at her. The light from the lantern intensified the furrows between his brooding eyes. "And think what it meant to Weatherbee to have seen, as he had, day after day, hour after hour, the heart of another man's wife laid bare, while to his own he himself was simply a source of revenue."

Miss Armitage too rose and stood meeting his look. Her lip trembled a little, but the blue lights flamed in her eyes. "You believe that," she said, and her voice dropped

into an unexpected note. "You believe he threw away that rich discovery for the few hundreds of dollars he sent his wife; but I know — she was told — differently. She thought he was glad to — escape — at so small a price. He wrote he was glad she had reconsidered that trip; Alaska was no place for her."

"Madam," Tisdale remonstrated softly, "you couldn't judge David Weatherbee literally by his letters. If you had ever felt his personality, you would have caught the undercurrent, deep and strong, sweeping between the lines. It wasn't himself that counted; it was what was best for her. You couldn't estimate him by other men; he stood, like your white mountain, alone above the crowd. And he set a pedestal higher than himself and raised his wife there to worship and glorify. A word from her at any time would have turned the balance and brought him home; her presence, her sympathy, even that last season at the Aurora mine, would have brought him through. I wish you had seen his face that day I met him below the glacier and had told him about the woman waiting down the gorge. 'My God, Tisdale,' he said, 'suppose it had been my wife.'"

Miss Armitage stood another moment, locking her hands one over the other in a tightening grip. Her lip trembled again, but the words failed. She turned and walked uncertainly the few steps to the end of the porch.

"You believe she might have influenced him, but I do not. Oh, I see, I see, how you have measured him by your own great heart. But"—she turned towards him and went on slowly, her voice fluctuating in little, steady pauses—"even if you were right, you might be generous; you might try to imagine her side. Suppose she had not guessed his — need — of her; been able to read, as you did, between the lines. Sometimes a woman waits to be told. A proud woman does." She came back the few

steps. "Beatriz Weatherbee isn't the kind of woman you think she is. She has faults, of course, but she has tried to make the best of her life. If she made a mistake — or thought she had — no one else knew it. She braved it through. She's been high-strung, too."

Tisdale put up his hand. "Don't say any more; don't try to excuse her to me. It's of no use. Good night." But a few feet from the porch he stopped to add, less grimly: "I should have said good morning. You see how that pyramid stands out against that pale streak of horizon. There is only time for a nap before sunrise. Day is breaking."

She was silent, but something in the intensity of her gaze, the unspoken appeal that had also a hint of dread, the stillness of her small face, white in the uncertain light when so lately he had seen it sparkle and glow, brought him back.

"I've tired you out," he said. "I shouldn't have told you that story. But this outlook to-night reminded me of that other canyon, and I thought it might help to bridge over the time. There's nothing can tide one through an unpleasant situation like hearing about some one who fared worse. And I hadn't meant to go so far into details. I'm sorry," and he held out his hand, "but it was your interest, sympathy, something about you, that drew me on."

She did not answer directly. She seemed to need the moment to find her voice and bring it under control. Then, "Any one must have been interested," she said, and drew away her hand. "You have the story-teller's gift. And I want to thank you for making it all so clear to me; it was a revelation."

CHAPTER IX

THE DUNES OF THE COLUMBIA

BEHIND them, as Tisdale drove down, the heights they had crossed were still shrouded in thunder-caps, but before them the end of the Wenatchee range lifted clear-cut, in a mighty promontory, from the face of the desert. Already the morning sun gave a promise of heat, and as the bays rounded a knoll, Miss Armitage raised her hands to shade her eyes.

"What color!" she exclaimed. "How barbarous! How ages old! But don't say this is the Columbia, Mr. Tisdale. I know it is the Nile. Those are the ruins of Thebes. In a moment we shall see the rest of the pyramids and the Sphinx."

Tisdale brought the horses around a sand-pit in the road which began to parallel the river, rolling wide and swift and intensely blue, where the rapids ceased, then he glanced at the other shore, where fantastic columns and broken walls of granite rose like a ruined city through a red glory.

"It is worth coming from New York to see, but you have traveled abroad. Do you know, that disappoints me. A true American should see America first."

"Then I confess." The girl laughed softly. "I haven't been nearer the Nile than a lantern-slide lecture and the moving-picture show. But my father knew Egypt when he was a boy; maybe I've inherited some memories, too."

Her enthusiasm was irresistible. Looking into her glowing face, the mirth-provoking lines broke and re-formed at the corners of his own mouth and eyes.

"But," he explained after a moment, "this desert of the Columbia is not old; it's tremendously new; so new that Nature hasn't had time to take the scaffolding away. You know — do you not — this was all once a great inland sea? Countless glacial streams brought wash down from the mountains, filling the shallows with the finest alluvial earth. Then, in some big upheaval, one or perhaps several of these volcanic peaks poured down a strata of lava and ash. As the ice tongues receded, the streams gradually dried; only the larger ones, fed far back in the range, are left to-day."

"How interesting!" Her glance swept upward and backward along the heights and returned to the levels. "And naturally, as the bed of the sea was laid bare, these last streams found the lowest depression, the channel of the Columbia."

Her quickness, her evident desire to grasp the great scheme of things, which other women received with poorly veiled indifference, often hurried to evade, warmed his scientist soul. "Yes," he answered, "Nature remembered, while she was busy, to construct the main flume. She might as well have said, when it was finished: 'Here are some garden tracts I reclaimed for you. Now get to work; show what you can do.'"

"And are you going to?" Her voice caught a little; she watched his face covertly yet expectantly, her breath arrested, with parted lips.

"Perhaps. I am on my way to find a certain garden spot that belonged to David Weatherbee. He knew more about reclamation than I, for he grew up among your California orchards, but I have the plans he drew; I ought to be able to see his project through."

"You mean you may buy the land, Mr. Tisdale, if — things — are as you expect?"

"Yes, provided I have Mrs. Weatherbee's price."

"What do you consider the tract is worth?"

"I couldn't make a fair estimate before I have been over the ground. Seattle promoters are listing Wenatchee fruit lands now, but the Weatherbee tract is off the main valley. Still, the railroad passes within a few miles, and the property must have made some advance since he bought the quarter section. That was over nine years ago. He was a student at Stanford then and spent a summer vacation up here in the Cascades with a party of engineers who were running surveys for the Great Northern. One day he was riding along a high ridge at the top of one of those arid gulfs, when he came to a bubbling spring. It was so cool and pleasant up there above the desert heat that he set up a little camp of his own in the shade of some pine trees that rimmed the pool, and the rest of the season he rode to and from his work. Then he began to see the possibilities of that alluvial pocket under irrigation, and before he went back to college he secured the quarter section. That was his final year, and he expected to return the next summer and open the project. But his whole future was changed by that unfortunate marriage. His wife was not the kind of woman to follow him into the desert and share inevitable discomfort and hardship until his scheme should mature. He began to plan a little Eden for her at the core, and to secure more capital he went to Alaska. He hoped to make a rich strike and come back in a year or two with plenty of money to hurry the project through. You know how near he came to it once, and why he failed. And that was not the only time. But every year he stayed in the north, his scheme took a stronger hold on him. He used to spend long Arctic nights elaborating, making over his plans. He thought and brooded

on them so much that finally, when the end came, up there in the Chugach snows, he set up an orchard of spruce twigs —”

“I know, I know,” interrupted Miss Armitage. “Please don’t tell it over again. I — can’t — bear it.” And she sank against the back of the seat, shuddering, and covered her eyes with her hands.

Tisdale looked at her, puzzled. “Again?” he repeated. “But I see you must have heard the story through Mr. Feversham. I told it at the clubhouse the night he was in Seattle.”

“It’s impossible to explain; you never could understand.” She sat erect, but Tisdale felt her body tremble, and she went on swiftly, with little breaks and catches: “You don’t know the hold your story has on me. I’ve dreamed it all over at night; I’ve wakened cold and wet with perspiration from head to foot, as though I — too — were struggling through those frozen solitudes. I’ve been afraid to sleep sometimes, the dread of facing — it — is so strong.”

Watching her, a sudden tenderness rose through the wonder in Tisdale’s face.

“So you dreamed you were fighting it through with me; that’s strange. But I see the story was too hard for you; Feversham shouldn’t have told it.” He paused and his brows clouded. “I wish I could make Weatherbee’s wife dream it,” he broke out. “It might teach her what he endured. I have gone over the ground with her in imagination, mile after mile, that long trek from Nome. I have seen her done for, whimpering in a corner, like the weakest husky in the team, there at the Aurora mine, and at her limit again up in Rainy Pass. And once lately, the night of the club supper, while I was lying awake in my room, looking off through the window to the harbor lights and the stars, I heard her crying deeply from the heart. She

did not seem like herself then, but a different woman I was mighty sorry for."

Miss Armitage turned and met his look, questioning, hardly comprehending. "That sounds occult," she said.

"Does it? Well, perhaps it is. But a man who has lived in the big spaces has his senses sharpened. He sees farther; feels more."

There was a silent moment. The colts, topping a low dune, felt the pressure of the fills on the down-grade, and the nigh horse broke, turning the front wheel into a tangle of sage. "Mr. Tisdale," she cried a little tremulously, "do you think this is a catboat, tacking into a squall? Please, please let me drive."

Her effort was supreme. It relieved the tension, and when the change was made, she drew to the edge of the seat, holding her head high like that intrepid flower to which he had compared her.

"You mean," she said evenly, "the terrible silence of your big spaces keys up the subjective mind. That, of course, was the trouble with Mrs. Barbour's husband. He allowed it to dominate him. But a man like you"—and she gave him her swift, direct look, and the shadow of a smile touched her mouth—"well-balanced, strong, would have kept the danger down. I should never be afraid—for you. But," she hurried on, "I can understand too how in the great solitudes some men are drawn together. You have shown me. I did not know before I heard your story how much a man can endure for a friend—and sacrifice."

Tisdale looked off over the desert. "Friendship up there does mean something," he answered quietly. "Mere companionship in the Alaska wilderness is a test. I don't know whether it's the darkness of those interminable winters, or the monotony that plays on a man's nerves, but I have seen the closest partners get beyond speaking to

each other. It's a life to bring out the good and the bad in a man; a life to make men hate; and it can forge two men together. But David Weatherbee never had an enemy. He never failed a man. In a crisis he was great. If things had been reversed"—he set his lips, his face hardened—"if Weatherbee had been in my place, there at Nome, with a letter of mine in his hands, he wouldn't have thrown away those four days."

"Yes, he would. Consider. He must have taken time to prepare for that terrible journey. How else could he have carried it through?" She leaned forward a little, compelling his glance, trying to reason down the tragedy in his face.

"How can you blame yourself?" she finished brokenly. "You must not. I will not—let you."

"Thank you for saying that." Tisdale's rugged features worked. He laid his hand for an instant over hers. "If any one in the world can set me right with myself, it is you."

After that they both were silent. They began to round the bold promontory at the end of the Wenatchee range; the Badger loomed on the rim of the desert, then Old Baldy seemed to swing his sheer front like an opened portal to let the blue flood of the Columbia through. The interest crept back to her face. Between them and those guardian peaks a steel bridge, fine as a spider web, was etched on the river, then a first orchard broke the areas of sage, the rows of young trees radiating from a small, new dwelling, like a geometrical pattern. Finally she said: "I would like to know a little more about Mrs. Barbour. Did you ever see her again, Mr. Tisdale? Or the child?"

"Oh, yes. I made it a point the next winter, when I was in Washington, to run down into Virginia and look them up. And I have always kept in touch with them. She sends me new pictures of the boy every year. He

keeps her busy. He was a rugged little chap at the start, did his best to grow, and bright!"—Tisdale paused, shaking his head, while the humorous lines deepened — "But he had to be vigorous to carry the name she gave him. Did I tell you it was Weatherbee Tisdale? Think of shouldering the names of two full-sized men on that atom. But she picked a nice diminutive out of it — 'Bee.'

"It was a great christening party," he went on reminiscently. "She arranged it when she passed through Seattle and had several hours to wait for her train. The ceremony was at Trinity, that stone church on the first hill, and the Bishop of Alaska, who was waiting too, officiated. I was in town at the time, getting my outfit together for another season in the north, but Weatherbee had to assume his responsibilities by proxy."

"Do you mean David Weatherbee was the child's godfather?"

"One of them, yes." Tisdale paused, and his brows clouded. "I wish the boy had been his own. That would have been his salvation. If David Weatherbee had had a son, he would be here with us now, to-day."

Miss Armitage was silent. She looked off up the unfolding watercourse, and the great weariness Tisdale had noticed that hour before dawn settled again on her face.

He laid his hand on the reins. "You are tired out," he said. "Come, give the lines to me. You've deceived me with all that fine show of spirits, but I've been selfish, or I must have seen. The truth is, I've been humoring this hand."

"You mean," she said quickly, "this vixen did hurt you yesterday more than you would admit?"

"Oh, no, but the friction of the reins can make even a scratch uncomfortable after a while, and my glove is getting tight. A little peroxide, when we reach a pharmacy, will fix it all right."

But Miss Armitage watched him doubtfully. She assured him she was not tired and that she loved to drive. Had she not told him so at the start? Then, as they left the promontory, her glance followed the road ahead. The bridge was no longer fine as a spider web; it was a railroad crossing of steel, and the long eaves of the Great Northern depot lifted near, flanked by the business blocks of a town. "Wenatchee!" she exclaimed; and wavering, asked: "*Isn't* this Wenatchee?"

"Yes, Miss Armitage, I am afraid that it is. You are back to civilization. A few minutes more and, if you will give me their address, you will be safe with your friends."

"I did not say I had any friends in Wenatchee, Mr. Tisdale. I am going on to Hesperides Vale. But please leave me at any quiet hotel. I can't thank you enough for all your kindness and patience," she went on hurriedly. "For making this trip possible. All I can hope to do is share the expense." And she found the inside pocket of her coat and drew out a small silver purse.

Tisdale, driving slowly, divided his attention between his team and the buildings on either side. "There is a public garage," he said, "and a rival establishment opposite. You will have no trouble to finish your trip by automobile, as you planned. It will be pleasant making the run up the valley this evening, when it is cool."

Miss Armitage opened her purse. "The rates must be considerably higher on a rough mountain road than on the Seattle boulevard, and, of course, one couldn't expect to hire Nip and Tuck at ordinary rates."

Tisdale drew in, hesitating, before a hotel, then relaxed the reins. "The building seems modern, but we may find a quiet little inn up some side street with more shade."

"I presume you will drive on up the valley," she said,

after a moment, "and start back to Kittitas to-morrow. Or will it be necessary to rest the team a day?"

"I shall drive on to that tract of Weatherbee's this afternoon; but I expect to take the westbound train to-night, somewhere up the valley."

"I see," she said quickly and tried to cover her dismay, "you intend to ship the team back to Kittitas by way of Seattle. I'm afraid"—her voice broke a little, the color flushed pinkly to her forehead, her ears, and her glance fell to the purse in her lap—"but please tell me the charges."

"Madam," and the ready humor crinkled the corners of his mouth, "when I ship these horses back to Lighter, he is going to pay the freight."

She drew a quick breath of relief, but her purse remained open, and she waited, regarding Tisdale with an expectant, disconcerting side-glance of her half-veiled eyes. "And the day rates for the use of the team?" she asked.

For a moment he was busy turning the horses. They had reached a second hotel, but it proved less inviting than the first, and the side streets they had crossed afforded no quiet inn, or indeed any dwelling in the shade. "After all," he said, "a room and bath on the north side, with windows looking up the Columbia, should make you fairly comfortable through the heat of the day." But the girl waited, and when his eyes fell to that open purse, his own color burned through the tan. There was no help for it; she must know the truth. He squared his shoulders, turning a little toward her. "There are no expenses to share, Miss Armitage. I—happened to own this team, and since we were traveling the same way, I was glad to offer you this vacant seat."

"Do you mean you bought these horses—outright—at Kittitas?"

"Yes, the opportunity was too good to miss." He tried to brave the astonishment in her eyes, but his glance moved directly to the colts. "And, you see, if I should buy that tract of Weatherbee's, I am going to need a team."

"Doubtless," answered Miss Armitage slowly. "Still, for breaking wild land or even cultivating, one would choose a steadier, heavier team. But they are beauties, Mr. Tisdale, and I know a man in Seattle who is going to be disappointed. I congratulate you on being able to secure them." She closed the purse at last and reluctantly put it away, and she added, with the merriment dimpling her lips: "Fate certainly was with me yesterday."

They had reached the hotel, and as he drew up to the curb, a man came from the lobby to hold the bays. Several traveling salesmen stood smoking and talking outside the entrance, while a little apart a land promoter and his possible capitalist consulted a blue print; but there was a general pause as Tisdale sprang out, and the curious scrutiny of wayfarers in a small town was focussed on the arrivals.

"It looks all right," he said quietly, helping her down, "but if you find anything wrong, or should happen to want me, I shall be at that other hotel until two o'clock. Good-by!"

He saw the surprise in her face change to swift appreciation. Then "Good-by," she answered and walked towards the door. But there she stopped. Tisdale, looking back as he gave her suitcase to a boy, saw her lips part, though she did not speak. Then her eyelids drooped, the color played softly in her face, and she turned to go in. There had been no invitation in her attitude, yet he had felt a certain appeal. It flashed over him she did not want to motor up the valley; she wished to drive on with him. Too proud, too fine to say so, she was

letting her opportunity go. He hurried across the pavement.

“Miss Armitage,” he said, and instantly she turned; the sparkles leaped in her eyes; she came towards him a few steps and stopped expectantly. “If I start up the valley at two”—and he looked at his watch—“that will be a rest of nearly three hours. It means the heat of the day, but if it seems better than motoring over a country road with a public chauffeur, I would be glad to have you drive for me.”

CHAPTER X

A WOMAN'S HEART-STRINGS

“**N**OW I know the meaning of Wenatchee. It's something racy, Mr. Tisdale, and a little wicked, yet with unexpected depths, and just the coolest, limpid hazel-green.”

Tisdale's pulses quickened; his blood responded to her exhilaration. “Yes, only”—and he waited to catch the glance she lifted from the stream—“your green is blue, and you forgot to count the sparkles in.”

As he spoke, the bays paced off the bridge. They sprang, gathering themselves lightly for a sharp ascent and for an interval held the driver's close attention. The town and the Columbia were behind, and the road, which followed the contour of the slopes rising abruptly from the Wenatchee, began a series of sudden turns; it cut shelf-wise high across the face of a ridge; spurs constantly closed after them; there seemed no way back or through, then, like an opening gate, a bluff detached from the wall ahead, and they entered another breadth of valley. In the wide levels that bordered the river, young orchards began to supplant the sage. Looking down from the thoroughfare, the even rows and squares seemed wrought on the tawny background like the designs of a great carpet. Sometimes, paralleling the road, the new High Line canal followed an upper cut; it trestled a ravine or, stopped by a rocky cliff, bored through. Where a finished spill-way irrigated a mountainside, all the steep incline between the runnels showed lines on lines of diminutive trees, pluckily taking root-hold.

A little after that, near an old mission, they dropped to a lower bench and passed an apple orchard in full bearing. Everywhere boughs laden with a gold or crimson harvest were supported by a network of scaffolding. It was marvelous that fruit could so crowd and cling to a slender stem and yet round and color to such perfection. Miss Armitage slowed the horses down and looked up the shady avenues. Presently a driveway divided the tract, leading to a dwelling so small it had the appearance of a toy house; but on the gatepost above the rural delivery box the name of the owner shone ostentatiously. It was "Henderson Bailey, Hesperides Vale."

"Do you see?" she asked. "This is that station master's orchard, where the Rome Beauty grew."

But the team was troublesome again. The road made a turn, rounding the orchard, and began the descent to a bridge. On the right a great water-wheel, supplied with huge, scoop-shaped buckets, was lifting water from the river to distribute it over a reclaimed section. The bays pranced toward it suspiciously. "Now, now, Tuck," she admonished, "be a soldier." The colt sidled gingerly. "Whoa, Nip, whoa!" and, rearing lightly, they took the approach with a rush.

As they quieted and trotted evenly off the bridge, a large and brilliant signboard set in an area of sage-brush challenged the eye. Miss Armitage fluted a laugh.

"Buy one of these Choice Lots,"

she read, with charming, slightly mocking exaggeration.

"Buy to-day.

"To-morrow will see this Property the Heart of a City.

"Buy before the Prices Soar.

"Talk with Henderson Bailey.

"This surely is Hesperides Vale," she added.

The amusement went out of Tisdale's face. "Yes, madam, and your journey's end. Probably the next post-box will announce the name of your friends."

She did not answer directly. She looked beyond the heads of the team to the top of the valley, where two brown slopes parted like drawn curtains and opened a blue vista of canyon closed by a lofty snow-peak. The sun had more than fulfilled its morning promise of heat, but a soft breeze began to pull from that white summit down the watercourse.

"I did not tell you I had friends in Hesperides Vale," she said at last. Her eyes continued to search the far blue canyon, but her color heightened at his quick glance of surprise, and she went on with a kind of breathlessness.

"I — I have a confession to make. I — But hasn't it occurred to you, Mr. Tisdale, that I might be interested in this land you are on your way to see?"

His glance changed. It settled into his clear, calculating look of appraisal. Under it her color flamed; she turned her face farther away. "No," he answered slowly, "No, that had not occurred to me."

"I should have told you at the beginning, but I thought, at first, you knew. Afterward — but I am going to explain now," and she turned resolutely, smiling a little to brave that look. "Mr. Morganstein had promised, when he planned the trip to Portland, that he would run over from Ellensburg to look the property up. He believed it might be feasible to plat it into five-acre tracts to put on the market. Of course we knew nothing of the difficulties of the road; we had heard it was an old stage route, and we expected to motor through and return the same day. So, when the accident happened to the car in Snoqualmie Pass, and the others were taking the Milwaukee train home,

I decided, on the impulse of the moment, to finish this side trip to Wenatchee and return to Seattle by the Great Northern. I admit seeing you on the eastbound influenced me. We — Mrs. Feversham — guessed you were on your way to see this land, and when the porter was uncertain of the stage from Ellensburg, but that you were leaving the trail below Kittitas, I thought you had found a newer, quicker way. So — I followed you."

Tisdale's brows relaxed. He laughed a little softly, trying to ease her evident distress. "I am glad you did, Miss Armitage. I am mighty glad you did. But I see," he went on slowly, his face clouding again, "I see Mrs. Weatherbee had been talking to you about that tract. It's strange I hadn't thought of that possibility. I'll wager she even tried to sell the land off a map, in Seattle. I wonder, though, when this Weatherbee trip was arranged to look the property over, that she didn't come, too. But no doubt that seemed too eager."

The blue lights flashed in her eyes; her lip trembled. "Be fair," she said. "You can afford to be — generous."

"I am going to be generous, Miss Armitage, to you." The ready humor touched his mouth again, the corners of his eyes. "I am going to take you over the ground with me; show you Weatherbee's project, his drawn plans. But afterwards, if you outbid me —"

"You need not be afraid of that," she interrupted quickly. "I — you must know" — she paused, her lashes drooped — "I — am not very rich," she finessed.

Tisdale laughed outright. "Neither am I. Neither am I." Then, his glance studying the road, he said: "I think we take that branch. But wait!" He drew his map from his pocket and pored over it a moment. "Yes, we turn there. After that there is just one track."

For an instant Miss Armitage seemed to waver. She

sent a backward look to the river, and the glance, returning, swept Tisdale; then she straightened in her seat and swung the bays into the branch. It cut the valley diagonally, away from the Wenatchee, past a last orchard, into wild lands that stretched in level benches under the mountain wall. One tawny, sage-mottled slope began to detach from the rest; it took the shape of a reclining brazen beast, partly leopard, partly wolf, and a line of pine trees that had taken root in a moist strata along the backbone had the effect of a bristling mane.

"That is Weatherbee's landmark," said Tisdale. "He called it Cerberus. It is all sketched in true as life on his plans. The gap there under the brute's paw is the entrance to his vale."

As they approached, the mountain seemed to move; it took the appearance of an animal, ready to spring. Miss Armitage, watching, shivered. The dreadful expectation she had shown the previous night when the cry of the cougar came down the wind, rose in her face. It was as though she had come upon that beast, more terrifying than she had feared, lying in wait for her. Then the moment passed. She raised her head, her hands tightened on the reins, and she drove resolutely into the shadows of the awful front. "Now," she said, not quite steadily, "now I know how monstrously alive a mountain can seem."

Tisdale looked at her. "You never could live in Alaska," he said. "You feel too much this personality of inanimate things. That was David Weatherbee's trouble. You know how in the end he thought those Alaska peaks were moving. They got to 'crowding' him."

The girl turned a little and met his look. Her eyes, wide with dread, entreated him. "Yes, I know," she said, and her voice was almost a whisper. "I was thinking of him. But please don't say any more. I can't — bear it — here."

So she was thinking of Weatherbee. Her emotion sprang from her sympathy for him. A gentleness that was almost tenderness crept over Tisdale's face. How fine she was, how sensitively made, and how measureless her capacity for loving, if she could feel like this for a man of whom she had only heard.

Miss Armitage, squaring her shoulders and sitting very erect once more, her lips closed in a straight red line, drove firmly on. A stream ran musically along the roadside,—a stream so small it was marvelous it had a voice. As they rounded the mountain, the gap widened into the mouth of the vale, which lifted back to an upper bench, over-topped by a lofty plateau. Then she swung the team around and stopped. The way was cut off by a barbed wire fence.

The enclosure was apparently a corral for a flock of Angora goats. There was no gate for the passage of teams; the road ended there, and a rough sign nailed to a hingeless wicket warned the wayfarer to "Keep Out." On a rocky knob near this entrance a gaunt, hard-featured woman sat knitting. She measured the trespassers with a furtive, smouldering glance and clicked her needles with unnecessary force.

Tisdale's eyes made a swift inventory of the poor shelter, half cabin, partly shed, that evidently housed both the woman and her flock, then searched the barren field for some sort of hitching post. But the few bushes along the stream were small, kept low, doubtless, by the browsing goats, and his glance rested on a fringe of poplars beyond the upper fence.

"There's no way around," he said at last, and the amusement broke softly in his face. "We will have to go through."

"The wicket will take the team singly," she answered, "but we must unhitch and leave the buggy here."

"And first, if you think you can hold the colts that long, I must tackle this thistle."

"I can manage," she said, and the sparkles danced in her eyes, "unless you are vanquished."

The woman rose and stood glowering while he sprang down and drew the wooden pin to open the wicket. Then, "You keep off my land," she ordered sharply.

"I will, madam," he answered quietly, "as soon as I am satisfied it is yours."

"I've lived on this claim 'most five years," she screamed. "I'm homesteading, and when I've used the water seven years, I get the rights." She sprang backward with a cattish movement and caught up a gun that had been concealed in some bushes. "Now you go," she said.

But Tisdale stayed. He stood weighing her with his steady, appraising eyes, while he drew the township plat from his pocket.

"This is the quarter section I have come to look up. It starts here, you see,"—and having unfolded the map, he turned to hold it under her glance—"at the mouth of this gap, and lifts back through the pocket, taking in the slopes to this bench and on up over this ridge to include these springs."

The woman, curbing herself to look at the plat, allowed the rifle to settle in the curve of her arm. "I piped the water down," she said. "This stream was a dry gully. I fenced and put up a house."

"The tract was commuted and bought outright from the Government over seven years ago." Tisdale's voice quickened; he set his lips dominantly and folded the map. "I have copies of the field notes with me and the owner's landscape plans. And I am a surveyor, madam. It won't take me long to find out whether there is a mistake. But, before I go over the ground, I must get my horses through to a hitching-place. I will have to lower that upper

fence, but if you will keep your goats together, I promise to put it back as soon as the team is through."

"You let that fence alone." Tisdale had started to cross the field, and she followed, railing, though the gun still rested in the hollow of her arm. "If one of those goats breaks away, the whole herd'll go wild. I can't round 'em in without my dog. He's off trailing one of the ewes. She strayed yesterday, and he'll chase the mountain through if he has to. It's no use to whistle; he won't come back without her. You let that fence be. You wouldn't dare to touch it," she finished impotently, "if I had a man."

"Haven't you?" Tisdale swung around, and his voice dropped to its soft undertone. "That's mighty hard. Who laid all that water-pipe? Who built your house?"

"I did," she answered grimly. "The man who hauled my load of lumber stopped long enough to help set the posts, but I did the rest."

"You did?" Tisdale shook his head incredulously. "My! My! Made all the necessary improvements, single-handed, to hold your homestead and at the same time managed these goats."

The woman's glance moved to the shack and out over the barren fields, and a shade of uncertainty crept into her passionate eyes. "The improvements don't make much of a show yet; I've had to be off so much in the mountains, foraging with the herd. But I was able to hire a boy half a day with the shearing this spring, and from now on they're going to pay. There are twenty-eight in the bunch, counting the kids, and I started with one old billy and two ewes."

"My! My! what a record!" Tisdale paused to look back at Miss Armitage, who had turned the bays, allowing them to pace down a length of road and back.

"But," he added, walking on, "what led you to choose goats instead of sheep?"

"I didn't do the choosing"; she moved abreast of Hollis, "it was a fool man."

"So," he answered softly, with a glimmer of amusement in his eyes, "there is a man, after all."

"There was," she corrected grimly. "The easiest fellow to be talked over under the sun; the kind always chasing off after a new scheme. First it was a mineral claim; then he banked the future on timber, and when he got tired waiting for stumpage to soar, he put up a dinky sawmill to cut his own trees. He was doing well, for him, getting out ties for a new railroad—it was down in Oregon—when he saw the chance to trade for a proved-up homestead. But it was the limit when he started out to buy a bunch of sheep and came back with that old Angora billy and two ewes."

"I see." They were near the fence, and Tisdale swerved a little to reach a stout poplar that formed the corner post. He saw that the wire ends met there and felt in his pocket for his knife. "I see. And then he left the responsibility to his wife."

"The wedding hadn't come off," she said sharply. "It was fixed for the seventeenth of June, and that was only May. And I told him I couldn't risk it—not in the face of those goats."

"And he?" pressed Hollis gently. This thistle, isolated, denied human intercourse, was more easily handled than he had hoped.

"He said it suited him all right. He had been wanting to go to Alaska. Nothing but that wedding had kept him back."

Tisdale stopped and opened his knife. "And he went?" he asked.

"Yes." The woman's face worked a little, and she

stood looking at him with hard, tragic eyes. "He sold the homestead for what he could get to raise the money to take him to Dawson. He was gone in less than twenty-four hours and before daylight, that night he left, I heard those goats ma-a-ing under my window. He had staked them there in the front yard and tucked a note, with his compliments, in the door. He wrote he didn't know of anything else he could leave that would make me remember him better."

Tisdale shook his head. "I wish I had been there." He slipped the knife in between the ends of the wires and the bole, clawing, prying, twisting. "And you kept them?" he added.

"Yes, I don't know why, unless it was because I knew it was the last thing he expected. But I hated them worse than snakes. I couldn't stand it having them around, and I hired a boy to herd them out on his father's farm. Then I went on helping Dad, selling general merchandise and sorting mail. But the post-office was moved that year five miles to the new railroad station, and they put in a new man. Of course that meant a line of goods, too, and competition. Trade fell off, then sickness came. It lasted two years, and when Dad was gone, there wasn't much left of the store but debt." She paused a moment, looking up to the serene sky above the high plateau. A sudden moisture softened her burning eyes, and her free hand crept to her throat. "Dad was a mighty fine man," she said. "He had a great business head. It wasn't his fault he didn't leave me well fixed."

Tisdale laid the loosened wire down on the ground and started to work on another. "But there was the man in Alaska," he said. "Of course you let him know."

"No, sir." Her eyes flashed back to Tisdale's face. "You wouldn't have caught me writing to Johnny Banks, then. I'm not that kind. The most I could do was to see

what I could make of the goats. I commenced herding them myself, but I hadn't the face to do it down there in Oregon, where everybody knew me, and I gradually worked north with them until I ended here."

Tisdale had dropped his knife. He stooped to pick it up. "That's where you made your mistake," he said.

The woman drew a step nearer, watching his face; tense, breathless. Clearly he had turned her thoughts from the fence, and he slipped the knife in farther and continued to pry and twist the wire loose. "How do you know it was a mistake?" she asked at last.

Tisdale laid the second wire down. "Well, wasn't it? To punish yourself like this, to cheat yourself out of the best years of your life, when you knew how much Banks thought of you. But you seem to have overlooked his side. Do you think, when he knows how you crucified yourself, it's going to make him any happier? He carried a great spirit bottled in that small, wiry frame, but he got to seeing himself through your eyes. He was ashamed of his failures—he had always been a little sensitive about his size—and it wasn't the usual enthusiasm that started him to Alaska; he was stung into going. It was like him to play his poor joke gamily, at the last, and pretend he didn't care. A word from you would have held him—you must have known that—and a letter from you afterwards, when you needed him, would have brought him back. Or you might have joined him up there and made a home for him all these years, but you chose to bury yourself here in the desert of the Columbia, starving your soul, wasting your best on these goats." He paused with the last loosened wire in his hands and stood looking at her with condemning eyes. "What made you?" he added, and his voice vibrated softly. "What made you?"

The woman's features worked; tears filled her eyes.

They must have been the first in many months, for they came with the gush that follows a probe. "You know him," she said brokenly. "You've seen him lately, up there in Alaska."

"I think so, yes. The Johnny Banks I knew in the north told me something about a girl he left down in Oregon. But she was a remarkably pretty girl, with merry black eyes and a nice color in her cheeks. Seems to me she used to wear a pink gown sometimes, and a pink rose in her black hair, and made a picture that the fellows busy along the new railroad came miles on Sundays to see."

A bleak smile touched the woman's mouth. "Dad always liked to see me wear nice clothes. He said it advertised the store." Then her glance fell to her coarse, wretched skirt, and the contrast struck poignantly.

Tisdale moved the wires back, clearing a space for the bays to pass. "There was one young engineer," he went on, as though she had not spoken; "a big, handsome fellow, who came oftener than the rest. Banks thought it was natural she should favor him. The little man believes yet that when he was out of the way she married that engineer."

The woman was beyond speech. Tisdale had penetrated the last barrier of her fortitude. The bitterness, pent so long, fostered in solitude, filled the vent and surged through. Her shoulders shook, she stumbled a few steps to the poplar and, throwing up her arm against the bole, buried her face, sobbing, in her sleeve.

Tisdale looked back across the field. Miss Armitage was holding the team in readiness at the wicket. "I am going now," he said. "You will have to watch your goats until I get the horses through. But if you will write that letter, madam, while I'm at work, I'll be glad to mail it for you."

The woman looked up. A sudden hope transfigured her face. "I wish I dared to. But he wouldn't know me now; I've changed so. Besides, I don't know his address."

"That's so." Tisdale met her glance thoughtfully. "But leave it to me. I think I can get into touch with him when I am back in Seattle."

Miss Armitage watched him as he came swiftly across the field. "Oh," she cried, when he reached the waiting team, "how did you accomplish it? Are you a magician?"

Hollis shook his head. "I only tried to play a little on her heart-strings, to gain time, and struck an unexpected chord. But it's all right. It's going to do her good."

CHAPTER XI

THE LOOPHOLE

THE afternoon sun shone hot in that pocket; the arid slopes reflected the glare; heat waves lifted; the snow-peak was shut out, and when a puff of wind found the gap it was a breath from the desert. Miss Armitage, who had trailed pluckily after Tisdale through the sagebrush and up the steep face of the bench, rested on the level, while he hurried on to find the easiest route to the high plateau and the spring. He had left her seated on a flat rock in the shade of a sentinel pine tree, looking over the vale to Cerberus and the distant bit of the Wenatchee showing beyond the mouth, but as he came back along the ridge, he saw she had turned her shoulder on the crouching mountain. At his far "Hello!" she waved her hand to him and rose to start across the bench to meet him. He was descending a broken stairway below two granite pillars that topped a semi-circular bluff and, springing from a knob to avoid a dry runnel, he shaped his way diagonally to abridge the distance. He moved with incredible swiftness, swinging by his hands to drop from a ledge, sliding where he must, and the ease and expediency with which he accomplished it all brought the admiration sparkling to her eyes.

"I am sorry," he said, as he drew near, "but there isn't any easy way. It's too bad to have traveled so far and miss the spring, for the whole project hinges on it; but the climb is impossible for you in this heat."

"Then you found the spring?" she asked quickly. "It was all the plans promised?"

"Yes." He began to walk on across the bench, suiting his steps to hers. "And Weatherbee had put in a small dam there to create his first reservoir. I found his old camp, too; a foundation of logs, open now to the sky, with a few tatters left of the canvas that had roofed it over." There was a silent moment, then he added, with the emotion still playing gently in his voice: "I wish I could show you that place; the pool is crystal clear and cool, rimmed in pines, like a basin of opals."

When they reached the flat rock in the shade of the pine tree, he took the reclamation plan from his inner pocket and seated himself beside her. "This is Weatherbee's drawing," he said. "See how carefully he worked in the detail. This is the spring and that upper reservoir, and this lower one is a natural dry basin up there under that bluff, a little to the left of those granite chimneys; you can see its rocky rim. All it needs is this short flume sketched in here to bring the water down, and a sluiceway to feed the main canal that follows this bench we are on. Spillways would irrigate a peach orchard along this slope below us and seep out through this level around us to supply home gardens and lawn. Just imagine it!" He paused, while her glance followed his brief comparisons, moving from the plan to the surface of the bench and down over the slope to the vale. "Imagine this tract at the end of four years; a billowing sea of green; with peach trees in bearing on this mountainside; apples, the finest Jonathans, Rome Beauties if you will, beginning to make a showing down there. Water running, seeping everywhere; strawberries carpeting the ground between the boles; alfalfa, cool and moist, filling in; and even Cerberus off there losing his sinister shape in vineyards."

"Then it is feasible," she exclaimed softly, and the

sparkles broke subdued in her eyes. "And the price, Mr. Tisdale; what would you consider a fair price for the property as it stands now, unimproved?"

Tisdale rose. He paused to fold the drawing and put it away, while his glance moved slowly down over the vale to the goat-keeper's cabin and her browsing flock. "You must see, Miss Armitage," he said then, "that idea of Mr. Morganstein's to plat this land into five-acre tracts for the market couldn't materialize. It is out of range of the Wenatchee valley projects; it is inaccessible to the railroad for the small farmer. Only the man with capital to work it on a large scale could make it pay. And the property is Mrs. Weatherbee's last asset; she is in urgent need of ready money. You should be able to make easy terms with her, but I warn you, if it comes to bidding, I am prepared to offer seven thousand dollars."

He turned, frowning a little, to look down at her and, catching those covert sparkles of her side-glance, smiled.

"You may have it," she said.

"Wait. Think it over," he answered. "I am going down to the gap now to find the surveyor's monument and trace the section line back to the top of the plateau. Rest here, where it's cooler, and I will come down this way for you when I am through. Think the project over and take my word for the spring; it's well worth the investment."

Doubtless Miss Armitage followed his suggestion, for she sat thoughtfully, almost absently, watching him down the slope. At the foot of the vale, the goat-woman joined him, and it was clear he again used his magic art, for presently he had her chaining for him and holding an improvised flag, while he estimated the section line. But finally, when they left the bed of the pocket and began to cross-cut up the opposite mountainside, the girl rose and looked in the direction of the spring. It was cooler; a

breeze was drawing down from the upper ridge; a few thin clouds like torn gauze veiled the sky overhead; the blue lost intensity. She began to walk across the bench towards the granite chimneys. In a little while she found the dry reservoir, walled, where the plateau lifted, in the semi-circular bluff; then she stopped at the foot of an arid gully that rose between this basin and a small shoulder which supported the first needle. This was the stairway she had seen Tisdale descend, and presently she commenced to climb it slowly, grasping bunches of the tenacious sage or jutting points of rock to ease her weight.

The stairs ended in a sharp incline covered with debris from the decomposing pillars; splinters of granite shifted under her tread; she felt the edges cutting through her shoes. Fragments began to rattle down; one larger rock crashed over the bluff into the dry basin. Then, at last, she was on the level, fighting for breath. She turned, trembling, and braced herself against the broken chimney to look back. She shrank closer to the needle and shook her head. It was as though she said: "I never could go back alone."

But when her glance moved to the opposite mountain-side, Tisdale was no longer in sight. And that shoulder was very narrow; it presented a sheer front to the vale, like the base of a monument, so that between the chimney and the drop to the gully there was little room in which to stand. She began to choose a course, picking her foothold cautiously, zigzagging as she had seen Hollis do on the slope above. Midway another knob jutted, supporting a second pillar and a single pine tree, but as she came under the chimney she was forced to hurry. Loose chip-pings of granite started at every step. They formed little torrents, undermining, rushing, threatening to sweep her down; and she reached the ledge in a panic. Then

she felt the stable security of the pine against her body and for a moment let herself go, sinking to the foot of the tree and covering her eyes with her hands.

Up there a stiff wind was blowing, and presently she saw the snow-peak she had missed in the vale. The ridge lifted less abruptly from this second spur, and in a little while she rose and pushed on, lagging sometimes, stumbling, to the level of the plateau. The Wenatchee range, of which it was a part, stretched bleak and forbidding, enclosing all those minor arid gulfs down to the final, long, scarred headland set against the Columbia desert. She was like a woman stranded, the last survivor, on an inhospitable coast. Turning to look across the valley of the Wenatchee, she saw the blue and glaciated crests of the Chelan mountains, and behind her, over the neck of a loftier height, loomed other white domes. And there yesterday's thunder-caps, bigger and blacker, with fringed edges, drove along the sky line. One purplish mass was streaming like a sieve. For an interval the sun was obscured, and her glance came back to the vale below where Cerberus reclined, watchful, his tawny head lifted slightly between two advanced paws. Suddenly the lower clouds grew brilliant, and shafts of light breaking through changed the mountain before her to a beast of brass.

She turned and began to pick her way through grease brush and insistent sage towards a grove of pines. In a little while she saw water shining through the trees. She hesitated — it was as though she had come to the threshold of a sanctuary — then went on under the boughs to the opal pool.

She remained in the grove a long time. When she reappeared, the desert eastward was curtained in a gray film. Torn breadths of it, driven by some local current of air, formed tented clouds along the promontory. It was as though yesterday's army was marshalled against

other hosts that held the Chelan heights. A twilight indistinctness settled over the valley between. Rain, a downpour, was near. She hurried on to the brow of the plateau, but she dared not attempt to go down around those crumbling chimneys alone. And Tisdale had said he would come back this side of the vale. Any moment he might appear. She turned to go back to the shelter of the pines. It was then a first electrical flash, like a drawn sword, challenged the opposite ridge. Instantly a searchlight from the encamped legions played over the lower plain. She turned again, wavering, and began to run on over the first dip of the slope and along to the first pillar. There she stopped, leaning on the rock, trembling, yet trying to force down her fear. It was useless; she could not venture over that stream of shifting granite. She started back, then stopped, wavering again. After a moment she lifted her voice in a clear, long call: "Mr. Tis — da — le!"

"I'm coming!" The answer rang surprisingly close, from the gully above the basin. Soon she discovered him and, looking up, he saw her standing clear-cut against a cavernous, dun-colored cloud, which, gathering all lesser drift into its gulf, drove low towards the plateau. She turned her face, watching it, and it seemed to belch wind like a bellows, for her skirt stiffened, and the loosened chiffon veil, lifting from her shoulders, streamed like the drapery of some ærial figure, poised there briefly on its flight through space. Then began cannonading. Army replied to army. The advancing film from the desert, grown black, became an illuminated scroll; thin ribbons of gold were traced on it, bowknots of tinsel. The pattern changed continually. The legions repeated their fire; javelins, shafts, flew. Lightning passed in vertical bolts, in sheets from ridge to ridge. Then the cloud approaching the plateau spoke, and the curtain moving from the

Columbia became a wall of doom, in which great cracks yawned, letting the light of eternity through.

The girl was flying down the slope to meet Tisdale. She came with bent head, hands to her ears, skimming the pitfalls. Under her light tread the loose debris hardly stirred. Then, as he rounded the pillar, her pace slackened. "I am afraid," she said and stumbled. "I am afraid." And her trembling body sank against his arm; she buried her face in his coat. "Take me away from this terrible place."

Her impact had started the splintered granite moving, but Hollis swung instantly and set his back to the crumbling chimney, clinging there, staying her with his arm, until the slide stopped.

"See here," he said, and his voice vibrated its soft undertone, "you mustn't lose your grip. It's all right. Old Mother Nature is just having one of her scolding fits. She has to show the woman in her once in a while. But it's going to end, any minute, in tears."

She lifted her face, and he paused, knitting his brows, yet smiling a little, mastering the terror in her eyes with his quiet, compelling gaze. "Come, Miss Armitage," he said, "we must hurry. You will be wet through."

He took her hand and began to lead her quickly down the rugged staircase. "Be careful," he admonished, "this granite is treacherous." But she gave little heed to her steps; she looked back continually over her shoulder, watching the dun cloud. Presently she tripped. Hollis turned to steady her, and, himself looking up beyond her, caught her in his arms and ran, springing, out of the gully.

The ledge he reached formed the rim of the natural reservoir and, measuring the distance with a swift glance, he let himself over, easing the drop with one hand on the rocky brink, while the other arm supported her. Mid-

way, on a jutting knob, he gathered momentary foothold, then swung to the bottom of the basin.

It was all done surely but with incredible haste, while the cavernous cloud drew directly overhead. The next instant, from its brazen depths, it spoke again. The whole mountain seemed to heave. Then something mighty crashed down. The basin suddenly darkened as though a trap door had closed, and Tisdale, still shielding his companion, stood looking up, listening, while the reverberations rang from slope to slope and filled the vale. Then silence came.

Miss Armitage drew erect, though her hand rested unconsciously on Tisdale's sleeve. The thing that roofed the basin was black, impenetrably thick; in it she saw no possible loophole of escape. "This time," she faltered, "Fate is against you."

Her breast rose and fell in deep, hurried breaths; in the twilight of the basin her eyes, meeting his, shone like twin stars. Tisdale's blood began to race; it rose full tide in his veins. "Fate is with me," he answered, and bent and kissed her mouth.

She shrank back, trembling, against the rocky wall; she glanced about her with the swift, futile manner of a creature helplessly trapped, then she pressed her fingers an instant to her eyes and straightened. "You never will forgive yourself," she said; not in anger, not in judgment, but in a tone so low, so sad, it seemed to express not only regret but finality.

Tisdale was silent. After a moment he turned to the lower side of the basin, which afforded better foothold than the wall he had descended, and began to work up from niche to ledge, grasping a chance bunch of sage, a stunted bush of chaparral that grew in a cranny, to steady himself. And the girl stood aloof, watching him. Finally he reached a shelf that brought him in touch with the ob-

struction overhead and stopped to take out his pocket-knife, with which he commenced to create a loophole. Little twigs rained down; a larger branch fell, letting the daylight through. The roof was a mesh of pine boughs.

At last he closed his knife and, taking firm hold on a fixed limb, leaned to reach his other palm down to her. "Come," he said, "set your foot in that first niche — no, the left one. Now, give me your hand."

She obeyed as she must, and Hollis pushed backward through the aperture he had made, getting the bough under one armpit. "Now, step to that jagged little spur; it's solid. The right one, too; there's room." She gained the upper ledge and waited, hugging the wall pluckily while he worked out on the rim of the basin and, stretching full length, with the stem of the tree under his waist, reached his arms down to her. "You will have to spring a little," he directed, "and grip my shoulders hard. Now, come!"

At last she was safe beside him. In another moment he was up and helped her to her feet. They stood looking towards the mountain top. The dun cloud stalking now with trailing skirts in the direction of the snow-peaks, hurled back a parting threat. "It was the pine tree," she exclaimed. "It was struck. And, see! It has carried down most of that chimney. Our staircase is completely wrecked."

Tisdale was silent. Her glance came back to him. A sudden emotion stirred her face. Then all the conservatism dropped from her like a discarded cloak, and he felt her intrepid spirit respond to his own. Now she understood that moment in the basin; she knew it had been supreme; she was great enough to see there was nothing to forgive. "You were right," she said, and her voice broke in those steadying pauses that carried more expres-

sion than any words. "Fate was with us again. But I owe — my life — to you."

"Sometime," he answered slowly, smiling a little, "not now, not here, I am going to hold you to the debt. And when I do, you are going to pay me — in full."

The beautiful color, that was like the pink of coral, flamed and went in her face. "We must hurry back to the team," she said and turned to finish the descent to the bench. "Horses are always so nervous in an electrical storm." Then suddenly, as Tisdale pushed by to help her in a difficult place, she stopped. "How strange!" she exclaimed. "That terrible curtain has lifted from the desert. It threatened a deluge any minute, and now it is moving off without a drop of rain."

"That's so," he replied. "A cross current of wind has turned it up the Columbia. But the rain is there; it is streaming along those Chelan summits in a downpour."

"And look!" she cried, after a moment. "A double rainbow! See how it spans the Wenatchee! It's a promise." And the turquoise lights shone once more in her eyes. "Here in this desert, at last, I may come to my 'pot of gold.'"

"You mean," responded Tisdale, "now you have seen the spring, Weatherbee's project seems possible to you. Well, I have reconsidered, too. I shall not outbid you. That would favor Mrs. Weatherbee too much. And my interests are going to keep me in Alaska indefinitely. I should be obliged to leave the plans in the hands of a manager, and I had rather trust them to you."

Miss Armitage did not answer directly. She was watching the arch, painted higher now, less brilliantly, on the lifting film. The light had gone out of her face. All the bench was in shadow; in the valley below a twilight indistinctness had fallen. Then suddenly once more Cerberus stood forth like a beast of brass. She shivered.

"It isn't possible," she said. "It isn't possible. Even if I dared — for David's sake — to assume the responsibility, I haven't the money to carry the project through."

Tisdale stopped and swung around. They had reached the flat rock under the sentinel pine tree. "Did you know David Weatherbee?" he asked.

She was silent. He put his hands in his pockets and stood regarding her with his upward look from under slightly frowning brows. "So you knew David," he went on. "In California, I presume, before he went to Alaska. But why didn't you tell me so?"

She waited another moment. In the great stillness Hollis heard her labored breathing. She put out her hand, steadying herself on the bole of the pine, then: "I've wanted to tell you," she began. "I've tried to — but — it was impossible to make you understand. I — I hadn't the courage."

Her voice fluted and broke. The last word was almost a whisper. She stood before Tisdale with veiled eyes, breath still coming hard and quick, the lovely color deepening and paling in her face, like a woman awaiting judgment. And it came over him in a flash, with the strength of conviction, that this beautiful, inscrutable girl wished him to know she had loved Weatherbee. Incredible as it seemed, she had been set aside for the Spanish woman. And she had learned about David's project; he himself perhaps had told her years ago in California. And though his wife had talked with Morganstein about platting the land into five-acre tracts to dispose of quickly, this woman had desired to see the property with a view to carrying out his plans. That was why she had continued the journey from Snoqualmie Pass alone. That was why she had braved the mountain drive with him. She had loved Weatherbee. This truth, sinking slowly, stirred his

inner consciousness and, wrenched in a rising commotion, something far down in the depths of him lost hold. He had presumed to think, in the infinite scheme of things, this one woman had been reserved for him. He had dared to let her know he believed so; he had taken advantage of her helpless situation, on an acquaintance of two days. His own color began to burn through the tan. "You were right," he said at last, very gently, "I never can forgive myself. I can't understand it!" he broke out then, "if you had been his wife, David Weatherbee would have been safe with us here, to-day."

Miss Armitage started. She gave him a quick, searching glance, then sank down upon the rock. She seemed suddenly exhausted, like a woman who, hard-pressed in the midst of peril, finds unexpectedly a friendly threshold.

Tisdale looked off to the brazen slopes of Cerberus. It was the first time he had censured Weatherbee for anything, and suddenly, while he brooded, protesting over that one paramount mistake, he felt himself unaccountably responsible. He was seized with a compelling desire to, in some way, make it up to her. "Come," he said, "you mustn't lose heart; to-morrow, when you are rested, it will look easier. And the question of ready money need not trouble you. Mrs. Weatherbee has reached the point where she has got to hedge on the future. Make her an offer of five thousand dollars in yearly payments, say, of fifteen hundred. She'll take it. Then, if you agree, I will arrange a loan with a Seattle bank. I should allow enough margin to cover the first reclamation expenses. Your fillers of alfalfa and strawberries would bring swift returns, and before your orchards came into bearing, your vineyards would pay the purchase price on the whole tract."

He turned to her, smiling, and surprised a despair in her face that went to his heart.

"I thought, I hoped you meant to buy this land," she said.

"So I did, so I do, unless you decide to. And if you undertake this project, I pledge myself to see you through." His voice caught a pleading undertone. "It rests with you. Above every one it rests with you to even things for Weatherbee. Isn't that clear to you? Look ahead five years; see this vale green and shady with orchards; the trees laden with harvest; imagine his wife standing here on this bench, surveying it all. See her waking to the knowledge she has let a fortune slip through her hands; see her, the purchase price spent, facing the fact that another woman built her faith on David Weatherbee; had the courage to carry out his scheme and found it a bonanza. That is what is going to make her punishment strike home."

Miss Armitage rose. She stood a moment watching his face, then, "How you hate her!" she said.

"Hate?" Tisdale's laugh rang short and hard. "Well, I grant it; hate is the word. I hate her so much I've known better than go where she was; I've avoided her as an electrician avoids charged wire. Still, if I had found myself in Weatherbee's place; if I had made his mistake and married her, she should have felt my streak of iron. I might have stayed in Alaska as he did, but she would have stayed too and made a home for me, helped to fight things through." He paused and, meeting the appeal in her eyes, his face softened. "I've distressed you again," he added. "I'm sorry; but it isn't safe for me to speak of that woman; the thought of her starts my temperature rising in bounds. I want you to help me forget her. Yet, down in the depths of your heart you know you blame her."

"Yes, I blame her." Miss Armitage began to walk on towards the edge of the bench. "I blame her, but not as

you do. I know she tried to do right; she would have gone to Alaska — if David had wished it — at the start. And she's been courageous, too. She's smiled — laughed in the face of defeat. Her closest friends never knew."

"You defend her. I wonder at that." Tisdale passed her and turned to offer his help down the first abrupt pitch. "How you, who are the one to censure her the most, can speak for her always, as you do. But there you are like Weatherbee. It was his way to take the losing side; champion the absent."

"And there is where your resemblance stops," she answered quickly. "He lacked your streak of iron. Of course you know about your strange likeness to him, Mr. Tisdale. It is so very marked; almost a dual personality. It isn't height and breadth of shoulder alone; it's in the carriage, the turn of the head; and it creeps into your eyes sometimes; it gets into your voice. The first time I saw you, it was startling."

Tisdale moved on, picking up the trail they had made in ascending; the humor began to play reminiscently at the corners of his mouth. "Yes, I know about that resemblance. When we were on the Tanana, it was 'Tisdale's Twin' and 'Dave's Double.' A man has to take a name that fits up there, and we seemed to grow more alike every day. But that often happens when two friends who are accustomed to think in the same channels are brought into continual touch, and the first year we spent in the north together we were alone for weeks at a stretch, with no other human intercourse, not a prospector's camp within a hundred miles. The most incompatible partners, under those circumstances, will pick up subconsciously tricks of speech and gesture. Still, looking back, I see it was I who changed. I had to live up to Weatherbee; justify his faith in me."

Miss Armitage shook her head slowly. "That is hard

to believe. Whoever tried to mould you would feel through the surface that streak of iron." They had come to another precipitous place, and Tisdale turned again to give her the support of his hand. The position brought his face on a level with hers, and involuntarily she stopped. "But whatever you may say, Mr. Tisdale," she went on, and as her palm rested in his the words gathered the weight of a pact, "whatever may — happen — I shall never forget your greatness to-day." She sprang down beside him, and drew away her hand and looked back to the summit they had left. "Still, tell me this," she said with a swift breathlessness. "If it had been David Weatherbee's wife up there with you when the thunderbolt struck, would it have made a difference? I mean, would you have left her to escape — or not — as she could?"

Tisdale waited a thoughtful moment. The ripple of amusement was gone; the iron, so near the surface, cropped through. "I can't answer that," he said. "I do not know. A man is not always able to control a first impulse, and before that pine tree fell there wasn't time to hesitate."

At this she was silent. All her buoyancy, the charming camaraderie that stopped just short of intimacy, had dropped from her. It was as though the atmosphere of that pocket rose and clung to her, enveloped her like a nimbus, as she went down. In the pent heat her face seemed cold. She had the appearance of being older. The fine vertical line at the corner of her mouth, which Tisdale had not noticed before, brought a tightness to his throat when he ventured to look at her. How could Weatherbee have been so blind? How could he have missed the finer, spiritual loveliness of this woman? Weatherbee, who himself had been so sensitive; whose intuition was almost feminine.

They had reached the final step from the bench to the

floor of the vale when Hollis spoke again. "If you do decide to buy this land and open the project, I could recommend a man who would make a trusty manager."

"Oh, you don't understand," she replied in desperation. "You don't understand. I should have to stay, to live in this terrible place for weeks, months at a time. I couldn't endure it. That dreadful mountain there at the gap would forever be watching me, holding me in."

Tisdale looked at her, knitting his brows, "I told you it was dangerous to allow yourself to feel the personality of inanimate things too much."

"I know. I know. And this terrible beast"—she paused, trying to steady her voice; her whole body trembled—"would remind me constantly of those awful Alaska peaks—the ones that crowded—threatened him."

Tisdale's face cleared. So that was the trouble. Now he understood. "Then it's all right"—the minor notes in his voice, vibrating softly, had the quality of a caress—"don't worry any more. I am going to buy this land of David's. Trust me to see the project through."

CHAPTER XII

“WHOM THE GODS WOULD DESTROY”

HOPE is an insistent thing. It may be strangled, lie cold and buried deep in the heart of a man, yet suddenly, without premonition, he may feel it rise and stretch small hands, groping towards a ray of light. So in that reminiscent hour while the train labored up through the Cascades to the great tunnel, Tisdale told himself this woman — the one woman for whom he must have been waiting all these years, at whose coming old and cherished memories had faded to shadows — was very near to loving him. Already she knew that those mysterious forces she called Fate had impelled them out of their separate orbits through unusual ways, to meet. Sometime — he would not press her, he could be patient — but sometime she would surely pay him that debt.

He dwelt with new interest on his resemblance to Weatherbee, and he told himself it was her constancy to David that had kept her safe. Then it came over him that if Weatherbee had married her instead of the Spanish woman, that must have been an insurmountable barrier between them to-day. As long as they lived, she must have remained sacred on her pedestal, out of reach. But how nobly partisan she was; how ready to cross swords for Weatherbee's wife. That was the incredible test; her capacity for loving was great.

The porter was turning on the lights. Tisdale moved a little and looked across the aisle. For that one moment he was glad Weatherbee had made his mistake. She

was so incomparable, so adorable. Any other woman must have lost attractiveness, shown at least the wear and tear of that mountain journey, but her weariness appealed to him as her buoyancy had not. She had taken off her hat to rest her head on the high, cushioned back of the seat, and the drooping curves of her short upper lip, the blue shadows under those outward curling black lashes, roused a new emotion, the paternal, in the depths of his great heart. He wished to smooth her ruffled hair; it was so soft, so vital; under the electric light it seemed to flash little answering blue sparks. Then his glance fell to her relaxed palms, open in her lap, and he felt a quick solicitude over a scratch the barbed fence must have made on one small, determined thumb.

They had had trouble with the horses in the vale. Nip, who had broken away during the storm, had been rounded in by the goat-woman and her returning collie. The travelers found her trying to extricate his halter which had caught, holding him dangerously close, in the wire fencing. It had taken caution and long patience to free him, and more to hitch the excited team. The delay had caused them to miss the westbound evening train; they were forced to drive back and spend the night at Wenatchee. And the morning Oriental Limited was crowded with delegates from some mystic order on an annual pilgrimage. There was no room in the observation car; Tisdale was able to secure only single seats on opposite sides of the sleeper.

The train rumbled through the great tunnel and came to a brief stop outside the west portal. It was snowing. Some railroad laborers, repairing the track, worked in overcoats and sweaters, hat brims drawn down, collars turned up against the bitter wind. The porter opened the transoms, and a piercing draught pulled through the smoky, heat-laden car. Miss Armitage sat erect and in-

haled a full breath. She looked across at Tisdale, and the sparkles broke softly in her eyes. "It's Wellington!" she exclaimed. "In a moment we shall be racing down to Scenic Hot Springs and on along the Skykomish — home." Then she stopped the porter. "Bring me a telegraph blank, please. I want to send a message from the Springs."

The limited, under way again, dropped below the cloud. Great peaks and shoulders lifted everywhere; they began to make the loop around an incredibly deep and fissure-like gorge. It was a wonderful feat of railroad engineering; people on the other side of the car got to their feet and came over to see. The girl, with the yellow blank in her hand, drew close to Tisdale's elbow. "Oh, no," she demurred, when he rose to offer his seat, "I only want standing room just a moment. There's going to be a delightful view of Scenic."

The passenger beside Hollis picked up his bag. "Take my place," he said. "I am getting off at the Springs."

Then presently, when she had moved into the vacated seat next the window, the peaks stood apart, and far, far below the untouched forest at the summer resort stood out darkly, with the gay eaves and gables of the hotel etched on it like a toy Swiss chalet on a green plateau.

"Oh," she cried softly, "it never seemed as charming before; but, of course, it is coming, as we have, straight from the hot desert. There's the coolest, fragrant wood road down there, Mr. Tisdale, from the hotel to Surprise Falls. It follows the stream past deep green pools and cascades breaking among the rocks. Listen. We should hear the river now."

Tisdale smiled. There was nothing to be heard but the echo of the running trucks and the scream of the whistle repeated from cliff and spur. They were switchbacking down the fire-scarred front of a mountain. He bent a lit-

tle to look beyond her. It was as though they were coasting down a tilted shelf in an oblique wall, and over the blackened skeletons of firs he followed the course of the river out through crowding blue buttes. Returning, his glance traced the track, cross-cutting up from the gorge.

"I know Surprise Falls," he said; "and the old Skykomish from start to finish. There's a point below the Springs where the current boils through great flumes of granite into a rocky basin. Long before the hotel was thought of, I fished that pool."

"I know! I know!" she responded, glowing. "We — Miss Morganstein and her brother and I — found it this summer. We had to work down-stream across those fissures to reach it, but it was worth the trouble. There never was another such pool. It was like a mighty bowl full of dissolving emeralds; and the trout loved it. We caught twenty, and we built a fire on the rocks and cooked them. It was delightfully cool and shady. It was one of those golden days one never forgets; I was sorry when it was gone." She paused, the high wave of her excitement passed. "I never could live in that treeless country," she went on. "Water, running as God made it, plenty of it, is a necessity to me. But please take your seat, Mr. Tisdale." She settled back in her place and began to date her telegram. "I am just sending the briefest message to let Mrs. Feversham know where I am."

"The porter is coming back for it now," he answered. "And thank you, but I am going in the smoking-car."

As he approached the vestibule, he caught her reflection in the mirror at the end of the sleeper. She was looking after him, and she leaned forward a little with parted lips, as though she had started to call him back, but her eyes clouded in uncertainty; then suddenly, the sparkle rose. It suffused her whole face. She had met his glance in the

glass. And the porter was waiting. She settled herself once more and devoted herself to the telegram.

The lines in Tisdale's face deepened mellowly. He believed that, now they were so near their journey's end, she wanted to be sure of an opportunity to thank him some more. "I am coming back," he said inwardly, addressing the woman in the mirror, "but I must have a smoke to keep my pulse normal."

But he did not return to the sleeper, for the reason that at Scenic Hot Springs the Seattle papers were brought aboard. The copy of the *Press* he bought contained the account of the accident in Snoqualmie Pass. The illustrations were unusually clear, and Daniels' cuts were supplemented by another labelled: "The Morganstein party leaving Vivian Court," which also designated the group.

(Mrs. Feversham, wife of the special delegate from Alaska, in the tonneau.

Her sister, Miss Morganstein, on her right.

Mrs. Weatherbee seated in front.

Frederic Morganstein driving the car.)

And under the central picture Hollis read: "Mrs. Weatherbee (Miss Armitage?), as she drove the machine into the embankment."

The paper rattled a little in his hands. His face flamed, then settled gray and very still. Except that his eyes moved, flashing from the photographs to the headlines, he might have been a man hewn of granite. "One more reason why the Snoqualmie highway should be improved," he read. "Narrow escape of the Morganstein party. Mrs. Weatherbee's presence of mind." And, half-way down the page, "Mrs. Weatherbee modestly assumes an incognito when interviewed by a representative of the *Press*."

But Tisdale did not look at the story. He crushed the

newspaper into the corner of his seat and turned his face to the window. His cigar had gone out. He laid it mechanically on the sill. So, this was the woman who had wrecked David Weatherbee; who had cast her spell over level-headed Foster; and already, in the less than three days he had known her, had made a complete idiot of him. Suppose Foster should hear about that drive through the mountains that had cost him over seven hundred dollars; suppose Foster should know about that episode in the basin on Weatherbee's own ground. A great revulsion came over him.

Presently he began to take up detail after detail of that journey. Now he saw the real impulse that had led her to board the eastbound train in Snoqualmie Pass. She had recognized him, conjectured he was on his way to find that tract of Weatherbee's; and she had determined to go over the land with him, cajole him into putting the highest estimate possible on the property. Even now, there in the sleeper, she was congratulating herself no doubt on the success of her scheme.

At the thought of the ease with which he had allowed himself to be ensnared, his muscles tightened. It was as though the iron in the man took shape, shook off the veneer, encased him like a coat of mail. Hitherto, in those remote Alaska solitudes, this would have meant the calling to account of some transgressor in his camp. He began to sift for the prime element in this woman's wonderful personality. It was not physical beauty alone; neither was it that mysterious magnetism, almost electrical, yet delicately responsive as a stringed instrument. One of these might have kept that tremendous hold on Weatherbee near, but on Weatherbee absent through those long, breaking years, hardly. It was something deeper; something elusive yet insistent that had made it easier for him to brave out his defeat alone in the Alaska wilderness than

come back to face. Clearly she was not just the handsome animal he had believed her to be. Had she not called herself proud? Had he not seen her courage? She had a spirit to break. A soul!

CHAPTER XIII

“A LITTLE STREAK OF LUCK”

IT was not the first time Jimmie Daniels had entertained the Society Editor at the Rathskeller, and that Monday, though he had invited her to lunch with him in the Venetian room, she asked him, as was her habit, to “order for both.”

“Isn’t there something special you’d like?” he asked generously; “something you haven’t had for a long time?”

“No. You are so much of an epicure — for a literary person — I know it’s sure to be something nice. Besides,” and the shadow of a smile drifted across her face, “it saves me guessing the state of your finances.”

A critic would have called Geraldine Atkins too slender for her height, and her face, notwithstanding its girlish freshness, hardly pretty. The chin, in spite of its dimple, was too strong; the lips, scarlet as a holly berry, lacked fullness and had a trick of closing firmly over her white teeth. Even her gray-blue eyes, which should have been a dreamer’s, had acquired a direct intensity of expression as though they were forever seeking the inner, real you. Still, from the rolling brim of her soft felt hat to the hem of her brown tailor-made, that cleared the ankles of trim brown shoes, she was undeniably chic and in the eyes of Jimmie Daniels “mighty nice.”

He was longer than usual filling out the card, and the waiter hesitated thoughtfully when he had read it, then he glanced from the young man to his companion with a comprehensive smile and hurried away. There was chilled

grapefruit in goblets with cracked ice, followed by bouillon, oysters, and a delectable young duck with toast. But it was only when the man brought a small green bottle and held it for Jimmie to approve the label that his guest began to arch her brows.

Daniels smiled his ingenuous smile. "It's just to celebrate a little streak of luck," he said. "And I owe it to you. If you hadn't been at Vivian Court to write up the decorations for that bridge-luncheon and happened to make that snap-shot of the Morganstein party, my leading lady would have gone to the paper as Miss Armitage straight, and I guess that would have queered me with the chief. But that headline you introduced about Mrs. Weatherbee's incognito struck him right. 'Well, Jimmie,' he said, 'you've saved your scalp this time.'"

The Society Editor smiled. "You were a gullible kiddie," she replied. "But it's a mystery to me how you could have lived in Seattle three years without knowing the prettiest woman on the boulevard by sight."

Jimmie shook his head. "I haven't the shadow of an excuse, unless it was because another girl was running such a close second she always cut off my view."

"Think," said Miss Atkins quickly, disregarding the excuse, "if that name, Miss Armitage, had been tagged to a picture that half the town would have recognized. Mrs. Weatherbee is the most popular lady, socially, in Seattle. When there's a reception for a new Council, she's always in the receiving line; she pours tea at the tennis tournament, and it was she who led the cotillion at the Charity ball. You would find her name in all the important affairs, if you read the society column."

Daniels nodded meekly. "It was a hairbreadth escape, and I'm mighty grateful."

There was a little silence then, but after the waiter had filled the long-stemmed glasses and hurried away, she said

slowly, her gray-blue eyes sifting Jimmie through and through: "It looks like you've been playing cards for money, but I never should have suspected it — of you."

Daniels shook his head gravely. "No get-rich-quick games for me. My luck doesn't come that way. But it cost me nearly two thousand dollars to find it out. I've always meant to tell you about that, sometime. That two thousand dollars was all my capital when I came to Seattle to take my course in journalism. I expected it to see me through. But, well, it was my first week at the University — fortunately I had paid the expenses of the first semester in advance — when one night a couple of fellows I knew brought me down to see the town. I didn't know much about a city then; I had grown up over in the sage-brush country, and I never had heard of a high-ball. To start with I had two, then I got interested in a game of roulette, and the last I remember I was learning to play poker. But I must have had more high-balls; the boys said afterwards they left me early in the evening with a new acquaintance; they couldn't get me to go home. I never knew how I got back to the dorm, and the next day, when I woke, the stubs of my checkbook showed I had signed practically all of my two thousand away."

There was a brief silence. Out in the main room the orchestra began to play. Miss Atkins was looking at Jimmie, and her scarlet lips were closed like a straight cord.

He drew his hand over his smooth, close-cut, dark hair and took a long draught from his glass of ice-water. "I can't make you understand how I felt about it," he went on, "but that two thousand was the price of my father's ranch over near the Columbia. It stood for years of privation, heart-breaking toil, and disappointment — the worst kind. Two seasons of drouth we saw the whole wheat crop blister and go to ruin. I carried water in

buckets from the river up to that plateau day after day, just to keep our home garden and a little patch of grass alive. And mother carried too up that breaking slope in the desert sun. It was thinking of that made me — all in. She worked the same way with the stock. Something lacking in the soil affected the feed, and some of the calves were born without hair; their bones were soft. It baffled my father and every man along that rim of the desert, but not mother. She said doctors prescribed lime for rickety human babies, and she made limewater and mixed it with the feed. It was just the thing. She was a small woman, but plucky from start to finish. And we, Dad and I, didn't know what it was costing her — till she was gone."

There was another silence. In the orchestra, out beyond the palms and screens of the Venetian room, the first violin was playing the *Humoresque*. The girl leaned forward slightly, watching Jimmie's face. Her lips were parted, and an unexpected sympathy softened her eyes.

"She had been a school teacher back in Iowa," he resumed, "and long winter evenings and Sundays when she could, she always had her books out. Up to the year I was twenty, she taught me all I knew. She tried her best to make a man of me, and I can see now how she turned my mind to journalism. She said some day there was going to be an opening for a newspaper right there in the Columbia desert. Where a great river received the waters of another big stream, there was bound to be a city. She saw farther than we did. The High Line canal was only a pipe dream then, but she believed it would come true. When she died, we hadn't the heart to stay on with the ranch, so Dad gave it to me, to sell for what I could get, and went back to Iowa. He said he had promised her he would give me a chance at the State University, and that was the best he could do. And, well, you see I had to come to the U. of W. to stay, and I was used

to work. I did all sorts of stunts out of hours and managed to pull through the second semester. Then I hiked over the mountains to the Wenatchee valley and earned enough that summer vacation to tide me over the next year. I had a friend there in the sage-brush country, a station agent named Bailey, who had blown a thousand dollars into a tract of desert land he hadn't seen off the map. He was the kind of fellow to call himself all kinds of a fool, then go ahead and make that ground pay his money back. He saw a way to bring it under irrigation and had it cleared and set to apples. But, while he was waiting for the trees to grow, he put in fillers of alfalfa and strawberries. He was operating for the new Milwaukee railroad then, and hired me to harvest his crops. They paid my wages and the two Japs I had to help, with a snug profit. And his trees were doing fine; thrifty, every one in the twenty acres. Last year they began to bear, only a few apples to a tree, but for flavor and size fit for Eden. This year he is giving up his position with the Milwaukee; his orchards are going to make him rich. And he wrote me the other day that the old ranch I threw away is coming under the new High Line ditch. The company that bought it has platted it into fruit tracts. Think of that! Trees growing all over that piece of desert. Water running to waste, where mother and I carried it in buckets through the sand, in the sweltering heat, up that miserable slope."

The Society Editor drew a full breath and settled back in her chair. Her glance fell to her glass, and she laid her fingers on the thin stem. Jimmie refreshed himself again with the ice-water. "I didn't mean to go into the story so deep," he said, "but you are a good listener."

"It was worth listening to," she answered earnestly. "I've always wondered about your mother; I knew she must have been nice. But you must simply hate the sight

of cards now. I am sorry I said what I did. And I don't care how it happened, here is to that 'Little Streak of Luck.' May it lead to the great pay-streak."

She reached her glass out for Jimmie to touch with his, then raised it to her lips. Daniels drank and held his glass off to examine the remaining liquor, like a connoisseur. "I play cards a little sometimes," he confessed; "on boats and places where I have to kill time. But," and he brightened, "it was this way about that streak of luck. I was detailed to write up the new Yacht Club quarters at West Seattle, with illustrations to show the finer boats at the anchorage and, while I was on the landing making an exposure of the Morganstein yacht, a tender put off with a message for me to come aboard. Mr. Morganstein had seen me from the deck, where he was nursing his injured leg. He was lonesome, I suppose. There was no one else in sight, though as I stepped over the side, I heard a victrola playing down below. 'How are you?' he said. 'Have a seat.' Then he scowled down the companionway and called: 'Elizabeth, stop that infernal machine, will you?'

"The music was turned off, and pretty soon Miss Morganstein came up the stairs. She was stunning, in a white sailor suit with red fixings, eyes black as midnight; piles of raven hair. But as soon as he had introduced us, and she had settled his pillows to suit him — he was lying in one of those invalid chairs — he sent her off to mix a julep or something. Then he said he presumed we were going to have a fine cut of the *Aquila* in the Sunday paper, if I was the reporter who made that exposure at the time of the accident to his car. I told him yes, I was Daniels, representing the *Press*, and had the good fortune to be in Snoqualmie Pass that day. 'I was sure of it,' he said. 'Watched you over there with these binoculars.' He put the glasses down on a table and opened a drawer and took

out his fountain-pen and checkbook. 'That write-up was so good,' he said, handing me the blank he had filled, 'I want to make you a little present. But you are the first *Press* reporter I ever gave anything to, and I want this kept quiet.'

"I thanked him, but when I looked at that check I woke up. It was for a cool hundred dollars. I tried to make him take it back; I told him my paper was paying me; besides, I couldn't accept all the credit; that you had fixed up the story and put the names right, and the first cut was yours. 'Never mind,' he said, 'I have something else for your society miss to do. I am going to have her describe my new country place, when it's all in shape. Takes a woman to get hold of the scenery and color schemes.' Then he insisted I had earned the extra money. Not one man in a hundred would have been quick enough to make that exposure, and the picture was certainly fine of the whole group. In fact, he wanted that film of the car swinging into the embankment. He wanted to have an enlargement made."

"I see," said Miss Atkins slowly, "I see." She paused, scooping the crest from her pineapple ice, then added: "Now we are getting to the core."

"I told him it belonged to the paper, but I thought I would be able to get it for him," Jimmie resumed. "And he asked me to bring it down to Pier Number Three just before four this afternoon. The *Aquila* was starting for a little cruise around Bainbridge Island to his country place, and if I wanted to work in something about her equipment and speed, I might sail as far as the Navy Yard, where they would make a short stop. Then he mentioned that Hollis Tisdale might be aboard, and possibly I would be able to pick up a little information on the coal question. These Government people were 'non-committal,' he said, but there was a snug corner behind the awn-

ings aft, where in any case I could work up my Yacht Club copy."

"So," remarked the Society Editor slowly, "it's a double core."

CHAPTER XIV

ON BOARD THE AQUILA

TISDALE'S rooms were very warm that afternoon. It was another of those rare, breezeless days, an aftermath of August rather than the advent of Indian summer, and the sun streamed in at the western windows. His injured hand, his whole feverish body, protested against the heat. The peroxide which he had applied to the hurt at Wenatchee had brought little relief, and that morning the increased pain and swelling had forced him to consult a surgeon, who had probed the wound, cut a little, bandaged it, and announced curtly that it looked like infection.

“But I can't afford to nurse this hand”—Hollis rose from the couch where he had thrown himself when he came in from the doctor's office —“I ought to be using it now.” He went over and drew the blinds, but the atmosphere seemed more stifling. He needed air, plenty of it, clean and fresh in God's out-of-doors; it was being penned in these close rooms that raised his temperature. He pulled the shades up again and took a turn across the floor. Then he noticed the crumpled note which, aimed left-handedly, had missed the waste basket earlier, when he opened his mail, and he went over and picked it up. He stood smoothing it on his desk. A perfume, spicy yet suggestive of roses, pervaded the sheet, which was written in a round, firm, masculine hand, under the gilt monogram, M. F. His glance ran through the lines:

“I am writing for my brother, Frederic Morganstein, who is recuperating aboard his yacht, to ask you to join us

on a little cruise around Bainbridge Island this afternoon at four o'clock. Ever since his interests have been identified with Alaska, he has hoped to know you personally, and he wishes particularly to meet you now, to thank you for your services in Snoqualmie Pass. In the general confusion after the accident I am afraid none of us remembered to.

"We expect to touch at the Navy Yard and again at Frederic's new villa to see how the work is coming on, but the trip should not take longer than four hours, and we are dining informally on board.

"Do not trouble to answer. If the salt air is a strong enough lure this warm day, you will find the *Aquila* at Pier Three.

"Very truly yours,

"MARCIA FEVERSHAM.

"Tuesday, September seventh."

"That floating palace ought to stir up some breeze." Tisdale crumpled the invitation again and dropped it deliberately in the waste basket. "And to-morrow I shall be shut up on my eastbound train." He looked at his watch; there was still half an hour to spare before the time of sailing. "After all, why not?"

A little later, when he had hurried into white flannels as expeditiously as possible with his disabled hand, the suggestion crept to his inner consciousness that he might find Mrs. Weatherbee aboard the *Aquila*. "Well, why not?" he asked himself again. "Why not?" and picked up his hat.

So he came to Pier Number Three and, looking down the gangway as he crossed, saw her standing in the little group awaiting him on the after deck. Morganstein spoke to him and introduced him to the ladies. He did not avoid her look and, under his appraising eyes, he saw the color begin to play in her face. Then her glance fell to his bandaged hand, and an inquiry rushed to her lips.

But she checked the words in time and drew slowly aloof to a seat near the rail.

Tisdale took a place near the reclining chair of his host. When she ventured to give him a swift side-glance, his mouth set austere. But the space between them became electrical. It was as though wireless messages passed continually between them.

"Look back. See how often I tried to tell you! My courage failed. Believe in me. I am not the monster you thought."

And always the one response: "The facts are all against you."

Duwamish Head had dropped from sight; Magnolia Bluff fell far astern, and the *Aquila* steamed out into the long, broad reach of Puget Sound; but though the tide had turned, there was still no wind. The late sun touched the glassy swells with the changing effect of a prism. The prow of the craft shattered this mirror, and her wake stretched in a ragged and widening crack. But under the awnings Frederic Morganstein's guests found it delightfully cool. Only Jimmie Daniels, huddled on a stool in the glare, outside the lowered curtain that cut him off from the breeze created by the motion of the yacht, felt uncomfortably warm.

The representative of the *Press* had arrived on board in time to see Tisdale come down the pier and had discreetly availed himself of the secluded place that the financier had previously put to his disposal. He had heard it told at the newspaper office that Tisdale, whose golden statements were to furnish his little scoop, Hollis Tisdale of Alaska and the Geographical Survey, who knew more about the coal situation than any other man, was also the most silent, baffling sphinx on record when it came to an interview.

At the moment the *Aquila* came into the open, the Jap-

anese boy placed a bowl of punch, with pleasant clinking of ice, on the wicker table before Mrs. Feversham, who began to serve it. Like Elizabeth's, the emblems on her nautical white costume were embroidered in scarlet, and a red silk handkerchief was knotted loosely on her full, boyish chest. She was not less striking, and indeed she believed this meeting on the deck of the yacht, where formalities were quickly abridged, would appeal to the out-of-doors man and pave the way to a closer acquaintance in Washington. But Tisdale's glance involuntarily moved beyond to the woman seated by the rail. Her head was turned so that he caught the finely chiseled profile, the outward sweep of black lashes, the adorable curve of the oval chin to meet the throat. She too wore the conventional sailor suit, but without color, and this effect of purity, the inscrutable delicacy of her, seemed to set her apart from these dark, materialistic sisters as though she had strayed like a lost vestal into the wrong atmosphere. His brows relaxed. For a moment the censor that had come to hold dominion in his heart was off guard. He felt the magnetism of her personality drawing him once more; he desired to cross the deck to her, drop a word into those deep places he had discovered, and see her emotions stir and overflow. Then suddenly the enthusiasm, for which during that drive through the mountains he had learned to watch, broke in her face. "Look!" she exclaimed softly. "See Rainier!"

Every one responded, but Tisdale started from his chair, and went over and stood beside her. There, southward, through golden haze, with the dark and wooded bluffs of Vashon Island flanking the deep foreground of opal sea, the dome lifted like a phantom peak. "It doesn't seem to belong to our world," she said, and her voice held its soft minor note, "but a vision of some higher, better country."

She turned to give him her rare, grave look, and instantly his eyes telegraphed appreciation. Then he remembered. The swift revulsion came over him. He swung on his heel to go back to his chair, and the unexpected movement brought him in conjunction with the punch tray. The boy righted it dexterously, and she took the offered glass and settled again in her seat. But from his place across the deck, Tisdale noticed a drop had fallen, spreading, above the hem of her white skirt. The red stain held his austere gaze. It became a symbol of blood; on the garment of the vestal the defilement of sacrifice.

She was responsible for Weatherbee's death. He must not forget that. And he saw through her. Now he saw. Had she not known at the beginning he was an out-of-doors man? That he lived his best in the high spaces close to Nature's heart? And so determined to win him in this way? She had meant to win him. Even yet, she could not trust alone to his desire to see David's project through, but threw in the charm of her own personality to swing the balance. Oh, she understood him. At the start she had read him, measured him, sounded him through. That supreme moment, at the crisis of the storm, had she not lent herself to the situation, counting the price? At this thought, the heat surged to his face. He wished in that instant to punish her, break her, but deeper than his anger with her burned a fury against himself. That he should have allowed her to use him, make a fool of him. He who had blamed Weatherbee, censured Foster, for less.

Then Marcia Feversham took advantage of the silence and, at her first statement, Jimmie Daniels sat erect; he forgot his thirst, the discomfort of his position, and opened his notebook on his knee. "I understand your work this season was in the Matanuska coal region, Mr.

Tisdale; you must be able to guess a little nearer than the rest of us as to the outcome of the Naval tests. Is it the Copper River Northwestern or the Prince William Development Company that is to have the open door?"

Tisdale's glance moved from the opal sea to the lady's face; the genial lines crinkled faintly at the corners of his eyes. "I believe the Bering and Matanuska coal will prove equally good for steaming purposes," he replied.

Frederic Morganstein grasped the arms of his chair and moved a little, risking a twinge of pain, to look squarely at Tisdale. "You mean the Government may conserve both?" His voice was habitually thick and deliberate, as though the words had difficulty to escape his heavy lips. "That, sir, would lock the shackles on every resource in Alaska. Guess you've seen how construction and development are forced to a standstill, pending the coal decision. Guess you know our few finished miles of railroad, built at immense expense and burdened with an outrageous tax, are operating under imported coal. Placed an order with Japan in the spring for three thousand tons."

"Think of it!" exclaimed Marcia. "Coal from the Orient, the lowest grade, when we should be exporting the best. Think of the handicap, the injustice put upon those pioneer Alaskans who fought tremendous obstacles to open the interior; who paved the way for civilization."

Tisdale's face clouded. "I am thinking of those pioneers, madam, and I believe the Government is going to. Present laws can be easily amended and enforced to fit nearly every situation until better ones are framed. The settler and prospector should have privileges, but at the same time the Government must put some restriction on speculation and monopoly."

Behind the awning Jimmie's pencil was racing down the

page, and Morganstein dropped his head back on the pillow; a purplish flush rose in his face.

"The trouble is," Hollis went on evenly, "each senator has been so over-burdened with the bills of his own State that Alaska has been side-tracked. But I know the President's interest is waking; he wants to see the situation intelligently; in fact, he favors a Government-built railroad from the coast to the upper Yukon. And I believe as soon as a selection is made for naval use, some of those old disputed coal claims — some, not all — will be allowed. Or else — Congress must pass a bill to lease Alaska coal lands."

"Lease Alaska coal lands?" Frederic started up again so recklessly he was forced to sink back with a groan. "Do you mean we won't be allowed to mine any coal in Alaska, in that case, except by lease?" And he added, turning his cheek to the pillow, "Oh, damn!"

Tisdale seemed not to have heard the question. His glance moved slowly again over the opal sea and rested on the shining ramparts of the Olympics, off the port bow. "Constance!" he exclaimed mellowly. "The Brothers! Eleanor!" Then he said whimsically: "Thank God they can't set steam-shovels to work there and level those peaks and fill the canyons. Do you know?" — his look returned briefly and the genial lines deepened — "those mountains were my playground when I was a boy. My last hunting trip, the year I finished college, came to an untimely end up there in the gorge of the Dosewallups. You see it? That shaded contour cross-cutting the front of Constance."

Elizabeth, who had opened her workbag, looked up with sudden interest. "Was there an accident?" she asked. "Something desperate and thrilling?"

"It seemed so to me," he said.

Then Mrs. Weatherbee rose and came over to the port

rail. "I see," she said, and shaded her eyes with her hand. "You mean where that gold mist rises between that snow slope and the blue rim of that lower, nearer mountain. And you had camped in that gorge"—her hand dropped; she turned to him expectantly—"with friends, on a hunting trip?"

He paused a moment then answered slowly: "Yes, madam, with one of them. Sandy, our old camp cook, made a third in the party."

CHAPTER XV

THE STORY OF THE TENAS PAPOOSE

TISDALE paused another moment, while his far-seeing gaze sifted the shadows of Constance, then began: "We had made camp that afternoon, at the point where Rocky Brook tumbles over the last boulders to join the swift current of the Dosewallups. I am something of an angler, and Sandy knew how to treat a Dolly Varden to divide honors with a rainbow; so while the others were pitching the tents, it fell to me to push up stream with my rod and flies. The banks rose in sharp pitches under low boughs of fir, hemlock, or cedar, but I managed to keep well to the bed of the stream, working from boulder to boulder and stopping to make a cast wherever a riffle looked promising. Finally, to avoid an unusually deep pool, I detoured around through the trees. It was very still in there; not even the cry of a jay or the drum of a woodpecker to break the silence, until suddenly I heard voices. Then, in a tangle of young alder, I picked up a trail and came soon on a group of squaws picking wild blackberries. They made a great picture with their beautifully woven, gently flaring, water-tight baskets, stained like pottery; their bright shawls wrapped scarfwise around their waists out of the way; heads bound in gay handkerchiefs. It was a long distance from any settlement, and they stood watching me curiously while I wedged myself between twin cedars, on over a big fallen fir, out of sight.

"A little later I found myself in a small pocket hemmed

by cliffs of nearly two hundred feet, over which the brook plunged in a fine cataract. Above, where it cut the precipice, a hanging spur of rock took the shape of a tiger's profile, and a depression colored by mineral deposit formed a big red eye; midway the stream struck shelving rock, breaking into a score of cascades that spread out fan-shape and poured into a deep, green, stone-lined pool; stirring, splashing, rippling ceaselessly, but so limpid I could see the trout. It was a place that held me. When at last I put away my flies and started down the bank, I knew dinner must be waiting for me, but I had a string of beauties to pacify Sandy. As I hurried down to the fallen tree, I heard the squaws calling to each other at a different point out of sight up the ridge; then I found a step in the rough bole and, setting my hands on the top, vaulted over. The next instant I would have given anything, the best years of my life, to undo that leap. There, where my foot had struck, left with some filled baskets in the lee of the log, lay a small papoose."

Tisdale's voice vibrated softly and stopped, while his glance moved from face to face. 'He held the rapt attention of every one, and in the pause the water along the keel played a minor interlude. Behind the awning a different sound broke faintly. It was like the rustle of paper; a turned page.

"The baby was bound to the usual-shaped board," Hollis went on, "with a woven pocket for the feet and a broad carrying-strap to fit the head of the mother. I sat down and lifted the little fellow to my knees. I wore heavy shoes, studded with nails for mountain climbing, and the mark of my heel was stamped, cruelly, on the small brown cheek; the rim had crushed the temple."

Tisdale halted again, and in the silence Elizabeth sighed. Then, "I'll bet you didn't waste any time in that place," exclaimed Morganstein.

"The eyes were closed," resumed Tisdale gently. "I saw the blow had taken him in his sleep, but the wantonness, the misery of it, turned me cold. Then, you are right, I was seized with a panic to get away. I laid the papoose back in the place where I had found him and left my string of fish, a poor tribute, with what money I had about me, and hurried down into the bed of the brook.

"The squaws were several days' travel from the reservation, but I remembered we had passed a small encampment a few miles down the river and another near the mouth of the Dosewallups, where a couple of Indians were fishing from canoes. I knew they would patrol the stream as soon as the alarm was given, and my only chance was to make a wide detour, avoiding my camp where they would first look for me, swim the river, and push through the forest, around that steep, pyramid peak to the next canyon. You see it? — The Duckabush cuts through there to tide water. I left no trail in crossing the stony bed of the brook, and took advantage of a low basalt bluff in climbing the farther bank. It was while I was working my way over the rock into cover of the trees that the pleasant calling on the ridge behind me changed to the first terrible cry. The mother had found her dead baby.

"Twilight was on me when I stopped at last on the river bank to take off my shoes. I rolled them with my coat in a snug pack, which I secured with a length of fish-line to my shoulders before I plunged in. The current was swift; I lost headway, and a whirlpool caught me; I was swept under, came up grazing a ragged rock, dipped again through a riffle, and when I finally gathered myself and won out to the opposite shore, there was my camp in full view below me. I was winded, bruised, shivering, and while I lay resting I watched Sandy. He stirred the fire under his kettle, put a fresh log on, then walked to the

mouth of the brook and stood looking up stream, wondering, no doubt, what was keeping me. Then a long cry came up the gorge. It was lost in the rush of the rapids and rose again in a wailing dirge. The young squaw was mourning for her papoose. It struck me colder than the waters of the Dosewallups. Sandy turned to listen. I knew I had only to call, show myself, and the boys would be ready to fight for me every step of the trail down to the settlement; but there was no need to drag them in; I hoped they would waste no time in going out, and I found my pocket compass, set a course, and pushed into the undergrowth.

"That night journey was long-drawn torture. The moon rose, but its light barely penetrated the fir boughs. My coat and shoes were gone, torn from me in the rapids, and I walked blindly into snares of broken and pronged branches, trod tangles of blackberry, and more than once my foot was pierced by the barbs of a devil's-club. Dawn found me stumbling into a small clearing. I was dull with weariness, but I saw a cabin with smoke rising from the chimney, and the possibility of a breakfast heartened me. As I hurried to the door, it opened, and a woman with a milking pail came out. At sight of me she stopped, her face went white, and, dropping the bucket, she moved backward into the room. The next moment she brought a rifle from behind the door. 'If you come one step nearer,' she cried, 'I'll shoot.'"

Tisdale paused, and the humor broke gently in his face. "I saw she was quite capable of it," he went on, "and I stopped. It was the first time I had seemed formidable to a woman, and I raised my hand to my head — my hat was gone — to smooth my ruffled hair; then my glance fell from my shirt sleeves, soiled and in tatters, down over my torn trousers to my shoeless feet; my socks were in rags. 'I am sorry,' I began, but she refused to listen. 'Don't

you say a word,' she warned and had the rifle to her shoulder, looking along the sight. 'If you do, I'll shoot, and I'm a pretty good shot.'

" 'I haven't a doubt of that,' I answered, taking the word, 'and even if you were not, you could hardly miss at that range.'

" Her color came back, and she stopped sighting to look me over. 'Now,' she said, 'you take that road down the Duckabush, and don't you stop short of a mile. Ain't you ashamed,' she shrilled, as I moved ignominiously into the trail, 'going 'round scaring ladies to death?'

" But I did not go that mile. Out of sight of the cabin I found myself in one of those old burned sections, overgrown with maple. The trees were very big, and the gnarled, fantastic limbs and boles were wrapped in thick bronze moss. It covered the huge, dead trunks and logs of the destroyed timber, carpeted the earth, and out of it grew a natural fernery." He turned his face a little, involuntarily seeking Mrs. Weatherbee. "I wish you could have seen that place," he said. "Imagine a great billowing sea of infinite shades of green, fronds waving everywhere, light, beautifully stencilled elk-fern, starting with a breadth of two feet and tapering to lengths of four or five; sword-fern shooting stiffly erect, and whole knolls mantled in maidenhair."

"I know, I know!" she responded breathlessly. "It must have been beautiful, but it was terrible if you were pursued. I have seen such a place. Wherever one stepped, fronds bent or broke and made a plain trail. But of course you kept to the beaten road."

Tisdale shook his head. "That road outside the clearing was simply a narrow, little used path; and I was so dead tired I began to look for a place where I might take an hour's rest. I chose a big cedar snag a few rods from the trail, the spreading kind that is always hollow, and

found the opening screened in fern and just wide enough to let me in. Almost instantly I was asleep and — do you know? — the humor broke again gently — “it was late in the afternoon when I wakened. And I was only roused then by a light blow on my face. I started up. The thing that had struck me was a moccasin, and its mate had dropped at my elbow. Then I saw a can of milk with a loaf of bread placed inside my door. But there was no one in sight, though I hurried to look, and I concluded that for some unaccountable reason that inhospitable woman had changed her opinion of me and wanted to make amends. I took a long draught of the milk — it was the best I ever tasted — then picked up one of the moccasins. It was new and elaborately beaded, the kind a woman fancies for wall decorations, and she had probably bartered with some passing squaw for the pair. But the size looked encouraging, and with a little ripping and cutting, I managed to work it on. Pinned to the toe of the other, I found a note. It ran like this: ‘Two Indians are trailing you. I sent them down-stream, but they will come back. They told me about that poor little papoose.’

“I saw she must have followed me that morning, while searching for her cow, or perhaps to satisfy herself I had left the clearing, and so discovered my hiding-place. The broader track of her skirts must have covered mine through the fern.”

Tisdale paused. The *Aquila* had come under the lee of Bainbridge Island. The Olympics were out of sight, as the yacht, heeling to the first tide rip, began to turn into the Narrows, and the batteries of Fort Ward commanded her bows; a beautiful wooded point broke the line of the opposite shore. It rimmed a small cove. But Mrs. Weatherbee was not interested; her attention remained fixed on Tisdale. Indeed he held the eyes of every

one. Then Marcia Feversham relieved the tension. "And the Indians came back?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, that was inevitable; they had to come back to pick up my trail. But you don't know what a different man that rest and the moccasins made of me. In five minutes I was on the road and making my best time up the gorge, in the opposite direction. The woman was standing in her door as I passed the cabin; she put a warning finger to her lips and waved me on. In a little while the ground began to fall in short pitches; sometimes it broke in steps over granite spurs where the exposed roots of fir and hemlock twined; then I came to a place where an immense boulder, big as a house, moving down the mountain, had left a swath through the timber, and I heard the thunder of the Duckabush. I turned into this cut, intending to cross the river and work down the canyon on the farther side, and as I went I saw the torrent storming below me, a winding sheet of spray. The boulder had stopped on a level bluff, but two sections, splitting from it, had dropped to the bank underneath and, tilting together in an apex, formed a small cavern through which washed a rill. It made a considerable pool and, dividing, poured on either side of the uprooted trunk of a fir that bridged the stream. The log was very old; it sagged mid-channel, as though a break had started, and snagged limbs stretched a line of pitfalls. But a few yards below the river plunged in cataract, and above I found sheer cliffs curving in a double horseshoe. It was impossible to swim the racing current, and I came back to the log. By that time another twilight was on me. The forest had been very still; I hadn't noticed a bird all day, but while I stood weighing the chances of that crossing, I heard the harsh call of a kingfisher or jay. It seemed to come from the slope beyond the bluff, and instantly an answer rose faintly in the direction of the trail. I was leaning on

one of the tilted slabs, and I wormed myself around the base, to avoid leaving an impression in the wet sand, and dipped under the trailing bough of a cedar, through the pool, and crawled up into the cavern. There wasn't room to stand erect, and I waited crouching, over moccasins in water. The cedar began to sway — I had used the upper boughs to ease myself in sliding down the slab from the bluff — a fragment of granite dropped, then an Indian came between me and the light.

“While he stopped to examine the sand at the edge of the pool, another followed. He ventured a short distance out on the log and came back, while the first set his rifle against the trunk and sank on his hands and knees to drink. The water, roiled probably by my steps, was not to his taste, and he rejected it with a disgusted ‘Hwah!’ When he rose, he stood looking across the pool into my cavern. I held my breath, hugging the bluff behind me like a lizard. It was so dark I doubted if even his lynx eyes could discover me, but he lifted the gun and for an instant I believed he meant to send a shot into the hole. Then he seemed to think better of wasting his ammunition and led the way down-stream. They stopped on a level bank over the cataract, and in a little while I caught the odor of smoke and later of cooking trout. My cramped position grew intolerable, and finally I crept out into the pool to reconnoitre. The light of their fire showed both figures stretched on the ground. They had camped for the night.

“It was useless to try to go down-stream; before dawn Indians would patrol the whole canyon; neither could I double back to the Dosewallups where they had as surely left a watch; my only course was to risk the log crossing at once, before the moon rose, and strike southward to the Lilliwaup, where, at the mouth of the gorge, I knew the mail steamer made infrequent stops. I began to work up

between the gnarled roots to the top of the trunk and pushed laboriously with infinite caution out over the channel. I felt every inch of that log, but once a dead branch snapped short in my hand, and the noise rang sharp as a pistol shot. I waited, flattening myself to the bole, but the thunder of the river must have drowned the sound; the Indians did not stir. So at last I came to the danger point. Groping for the break, I found it started underneath, reaching well around. Caused probably by some battering bulk in the spring floods, and widening slowly ever since, it needed only a slight shock to bring it to a finish. I grasped a stout snag and tried to swing myself over the place, but there came a splitting report; and there was just time to drop astride above that stub of limb, when the log parted below it, and I was in the river. I managed to keep my hold and my head out of water, though the current did its best to suck me under. Then I saw that while the main portion of the tree had been swept away, the top to which I clung remained fixed to the bank, wedged no doubt between trunks or boulders. As I began to draw myself up out of the wash, a resinous bough thrown on the fire warned me the Indians were roused, and I flattened again like a chameleon on the slippery incline. They came as far as the rill and stood looking across, then went down-stream, no doubt to see whether the trunk had stranded on the riffles below the cataract. But they were back before I could finish the log, and the rising moon illuminated the gorge. I was forced to swing to the shady side of the snag. The time dragged endlessly; a wind piping down the watercourse cut like a hundred whips through my wet clothes; and I think in the end I only kept my hold because my fingers were too stiff to let go. But at last the Indians stretched themselves once more on the ground; their fire burned low, and I wormed myself up within reach of a friendly young hemlock,

grasped a bough, and gained shelving rock. The next moment I relaxed, all but done for, on a dry bed of needles."

Tisdale paused, looking again from face to face, while the humor gleamed in his own. "I am making a long story of it," he said modestly. "You must be tired!"

"Tired!" exclaimed Elizabeth, "It's the very best story I ever heard. Please go on."

"Of course you escaped," supplemented Marcia Feversham, "but we want to know how. And what was your chum doing all the time? And wasn't there another woman?"

Frederic Morganstein rumbled a short laugh. "Maybe you made the Lilliwaup, but I'll bet ten to one you missed your steamer."

Tisdale's eyes rested involuntarily again on Mrs. Weatherbee. She did not say anything, but she met the look with her direct gaze; her short upper lip parted, and the color burned softly in her cheek. "I made the Lilliwaup," he went on, "about two miles from the mouth, between the upper and lower falls. The river breaks in cascades there, hundreds of them as far as one can see, divided by tremendous boulders."

"We know the place," said Elizabeth quickly. "Our first cruise on the *Aquila* was to the Lilliwaup. We climbed to the upper falls and spent hours along the cascades. Those boulders, hundreds of them, rose through the spray, all covered with little trees and ferns. There never was anything like it, but we called it The Fairy Isles."

Tisdale nodded. "It was near the end of that reach I found myself. The channels gather below, you remember, and pour down a steep declivity under a natural causeway. But the charm and grandeur were lost on me that day. I wanted to reach the old trail from the falls

on the opposite shore, and I knew that stone bridge fell short a span, so I began to work my way from boulder to boulder out to the main stream. It was a wide chasm to leap, with an upward spring to a tilted table of basalt, and I overbalanced, slipped down, and, coasting across the surface, recovered enough on the edge to ease myself off to a nearly submerged ledge. There I stopped." He paused an instant, and his eyes sought Marcia Feversham's; the amusement played lightly on his flexible lips. "I had stumbled on another woman. She was seated on a lower boulder, sketching the stone bridge. I was behind her, but I saw a pretty hand and forearm, some nice brown hair tucked under a big straw hat, and a trim and young figure in a well-made gown of blue linen. Then she said pleasantly, without turning her head: 'Well, John, what luck?'

"I drew back into a shallow niche of the rock. I had not forgotten the first impression I made on the woman up the Duckabush and had no desire to 'scare ladies.' But my steamer was almost due, and I hoped John would come soon. Getting no reply from him, she rose and glanced around. Then she looked at her watch, put her hand to her mouth, and sent a long call up the gorge. 'Joh-n, Joh-n, hello!' She had a carrying, singer's voice, but it brought no answer, so after a moment she gathered up her things and started towards the bank. I watched her disappear among the trees; then, my fear of missing the steamer growing stronger than the dread of terrifying her, I followed. The trail drops precipitously around the lower falls, you remember, and I struck the level where the river bends at the foot of the cataract, with considerable noise. I found myself in a sort of open-air parlor flanked by two tents; rustic seats under a canopy of maple boughs, hammocks, a percolator bubbling on a sheet-iron contrivance over the camp-fire coals, and,

looking at me across a table, the girl. 'I beg your pardon,' I hurried to say. 'Don't be afraid of me.'

"'Afraid?' she repeated. 'Afraid — of you?' And the way she said it, with a half scornful, half humorous surprise, the sight of her standing there so self-reliant, buoyant, the type of that civilization I had tried so hard to reach, started a reaction of my overstrained nerves. Still, I think I might have held myself together had I not at that moment caught the voice of that unhappy squaw. It struck a chill to my bones, and I sank down on the nearest seat and dropped my face in my hands, completely unmanned.

"I knew she came around the table and stood looking me over, but when I finally managed to lift my head, she had gone back to the percolator to bring me a cup of coffee. It had a pleasant aroma, and the cream with which she cooled it gave it a nice color. You don't know how that first draught steadied me. 'I am sorry, madam,' I said, 'but I have had a hard experience in these woods, and I expected to catch the mail boat for Seattle; but that singing down-stream means I am cut off.'

"She started a little and looked me over again with new interest. 'The squaw,' she said, 'is mourning for her papoose. It was a terrible accident. A young hunter up the Dosewallups, where the Indians were berrying, killed the baby in jumping a log.'

"'Yes, madam,' I answered, and rose and put the cup down, 'I am the man. It is harder breaking trail to the Lilliwaup than coming by canoe, and the Indians have beaten me. I must double back now to the Duckabush. By that time, they will have given up the watch.'

"'Wait,' she said, 'let me think.' But it did not take her long. A turn the length of the table, and her face brightened. 'Why, it's the easiest thing in the world,' she said. 'I must row you to the steamer.' Then when

I hesitated to let her run the risk, she explained that her party had moved their camp from the mouth of the Dosewallups after these Indians arrived there; they knew her; they had seen her rowing about, and she always carried a good many traps; an easel, sun umbrella, cushions, a steamer rug. I had only to lie down in the bottom of the boat, and she would cover me. And she drew back the flap of the nearest tent and told me to change my clothes for a brown suit she laid out, and canvas shoes. 'Come,' she urged, 'there's time enough but none to waste; and any minute the Indians may surprise you.'

She was waiting with the rug and pillows and a pair of oars when I came out, and helped me carry them to the boat which was beached a short distance below her camp. When it was launched, and I was stowed under the baggage, with an ample breathing hole through which I could watch the rower, she pushed off and fell into a long, even stroke. Presently I noticed she had nice eyes, brown and very deep, and I thought her face was beautiful. It had the expressiveness, the swift intelligence that goes with a strong personality, and through all her determination, I felt a running note of caution. I knew she saw clearly while she braved the extremity. After a while her breast began to rise and fall with the exercise, her cheeks flushed, and I saw she had met the flood tide. All this time the voice of the squaw grew steadily nearer. I imagined her, as I had seen others before, kneeling on the bank, rocking herself, beating her breast. Then it came over me that we were forced to hug the shore to avoid one of the reedy shallows that choked the estuary and must pass very close to her. The next moment there was a lull, and the girl looked across her shoulder and called 'Clahowya!' At the same time she rested on her oars long enough to take off her hat and toss it with careless directness on my breathing hole. The squaw's answer came from above me,

and she repeated and intoned the word so that it seemed part of her dirge. 'Clahowya! Clahowya! Clahowya! Wake tenas papoose. Halo! Halo!' The despair of it cut me worse than lashes. Then I heard other voices; a dog barked, and I understood we were skirting the encampment.

"After that the noise grew fainter, and in a little while the girl uncovered my face. The channel had widened; the tang of salt came on the wind; and when I ventured to raise my head a little, I saw the point at the mouth of the river looming purple-black. Then, as we began to round it, we came suddenly on a canoe, drifting broadside, with a single salmon hunter crouching in it, ready with his spear. It flashed over me that he was one of the two Indians who had tracked me to the Duckabush; the taller one who had tried to drink at the rill; then he made his throw and at the same instant the girl's hat fell again on my face. I heard her call her pleasant 'Clahowya!' and she added, rowing on evenly: 'Hyas delate salmon.' The next moment his answer rang astern: 'Clahowya! Clahowya! Hyas delate salmon.'

"At last I felt the swell of the open, and she leaned to uncover my face once more. 'The steamer is in sight,' she said, and I raised my head again and saw the boat, a small moving blot with a trailer of smoke, far up the sapphire sea. Then I turned on my elbow and looked back. The canoe and the encampment were hidden by the point; we were drifting off the wharf of the small town-site, almost abandoned, where the steamer made her stop. There was nothing left to do but express my gratitude, which I did clumsily enough.

"'You mustn't make so much of it,' she said; 'the first thing a reservation Indian is taught is to forget the old law, a life for a life.'

"'I know that,' I answered, 'still I couldn't have faced

the best white man that first hour, and off there in the mountains, away from reservation influences, my chances looked small. I wish I could be as sure the men who were with me are safe.'

"She gave me a long, calculating look. 'They will be—soon,' she said. 'My brother Robert should be on the steamer with the superintendent and reservation guard.' And she dipped her oars again, pointing the boat a little more towards the landing, and watched the steamer while I sifted her meaning.

"'So,' I said at last. 'So they are there at that camp. You knew it and brought me by.'

"'You couldn't have helped them any,' she said, 'and you can go back, if you wish, with the guard.' Then she told me how she had visited the camp with her brother Robert and had seen them bound with stout strips of elk-hide. They had explained the accident and how one of them, to give me time at the start, had put himself in my place."

Tisdale halted a moment; a wave of emotion crossed his face. His look rested on Mrs. Weatherbee, and his eyes drew and held hers. She leaned forward a little; her lips parted over a hushed breath. It was as though she braved while she feared his next words. "That possibility hadn't occurred to me," he went on, "yet I should have foreseen it, knowing the man as I did. We were built on the same lines, practically the same size, and we had outfitted together for the trip. He wore high, brown shoes spiked for mountain climbing, exactly like mine; he even matched the marks of that heel. But Sandy wouldn't stand for it. He declared there was a third man who had gone up Rocky Brook and had not come back. One of the squaws who had seen me agreed with him, but they were bound and taken to the encampment. The next morning an Indian found my coat and shoes lodged on a

gravel bar and picked up my trail. The camp moved then by canoe around to the mouth of the Duckabush, taking the prisoners with them, and waited for my trailers to come down. They had discovered me on the log crossing when it fell, and believed I was drowned."

There was another pause. Mrs. Weatherbee sighed and leaned back in her chair; then Mrs. Feversham said: "And they refused to let your substitute go?"

Tisdale nodded. "He was brought with Sandy along to the Lilliwaup. The Indians were traveling home, and no doubt the reservation influence had restrained them; still, they were staying a second night on the Lilliwaup, and when Robert spoke to them they were sullen and ugly. That was why he had hurried away to bring the superintendent down. He had started in his Peterboro but expected to find a man on the way who would take him on in his motor-boat. Once during the night John had drifted close to the camp to listen, but things were quiet, and they had bridged the morning with a little fishing and sketching up-stream.

"‘Suppose,’ I said at last, ‘suppose you had been afraid of me. I should be doubling back to the Duckabush now. As it is, I wouldn’t give much for their opinion of me.’

"‘I wish you could have heard that man Sandy,’ she said, and — did I tell you she had a very nice smile? ‘He called you true gold.’ And while she went on to repeat the rest he had told her, it struck me pleasantly I was listening to my own obituary. But the steamer was drawing close. She whistled the landing, and the girl dipped her oars again, pulling her long, even strokes. I threw off the rug and sat erect, ready to ease the boat off as we came alongside. And there on the lower deck watching us stood a young fellow whom, from his resemblance to her, I knew as brother Robert, with the superintendent

from the reservation, backed by the whole patrol. Then my old friend Doctor Wise, the new coroner at Hoodsport, came edging through the crowd to take my hand. 'Well, well, Tisdale, old man,' he said, 'this is good. Do you know they had you drowned — or worse?'

Tisdale settled back in his chair and, turning his face, looked off the port bow. The Narrows had dropped behind, and for a moment the deck of the *Aquila* slanted to the tide rip off Port Orchard; then she righted and raced lightly across the broad channel. Ahead, off Bremerton Navy Yard, some anchored cruisers rose in black silhouette against a brilliant sea.

"And," said Marcia Feversham, "of course you went to the camp in a body and released the prisoners."

"Yes, we used the mail steamer's boats, and she waited for us until the inquest was over, then brought us on to Seattle. The motor-boat took the doctor and superintendent home."

"And the girl," said Elizabeth after a moment, "did you never see her again?"

"Oh, yes." The genial lines deepened, and Hollis rose from his chair. "Often. I always look them up when I am in Seattle."

"But who was John?"

"John? Why, he was her husband."

The Olympics had reappeared; the sun dropped behind a cloud over a high crest; shafts of light silvered the gorges; the peaks caught an amethyst glow. Tisdale, tracing once more that far canyon across the front of Constance, walked slowly forward into the bows.

The yacht touched the Bremerton dock to take on the lieutenant who was expected aboard, and at the same time Jimmie Daniels swung lightly over the side aft. The Seattle steamer whistled from her slip on the farther side of the wharf, and he hurried to the gang-plank. There

he sent a glance behind and saw Tisdale still standing with his back squared to the landing, looking off over the harbor. And the *Press* representative smiled. He had gathered little information in regard to the coal question, but in that notebook, buttoned snugly away in his coat, he had set down the papoose story, word for word.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ALTERNATIVE

TISDALE did not follow the lieutenant aft. When the *Aquila* turned into Port Orchard, he still remained looking off her bows. The sun had set, a soft breeze was in his face, and the Sound was no longer a mirror; it fluted, broke in racy waves; the cutwater struck from them an intricate melody. Northward a few thin streamers of cloud warmed like painted flames, and their reflection changed the sea to running fire. Then he was conscious that some one approached behind him; she stopped at his elbow to watch the brilliant scene. And instantly the spirit of combat in him stirred; his muscles tightened like those of a man on guard.

After a moment she commenced to sing very softly, in unison with the music of the waves along the keel,

“How dear to me the hour when daylight dies.”

Even subdued, her voice was beautiful. It began surely, insistently, to undermine all that stout breastwork he had reared against her these twenty-four hours. But he thrust his hands in his pockets and turned to her with that upward look of probing, upbraiding eyes.

The song died. A flush rose over her face, but she met the look bravely. “I came to explain,” she said. “I thought at the beginning, when we started on that drive through the mountains, you knew my identity. Afterwards I tried repeatedly to tell you, but when I saw how bitterly you — hated — me, my courage failed.”

Her lip trembled over a sighing breath, and she looked

away up the brilliant sea. Tisdale could not doubt her. His mind raced back to incident on incident of that journey; in flashes it was all made clear to him. Even during that supreme hour of the electrical storm had she not tried to undeceive him? He forgave her her transgressions against him; he forgave her so completely that, at the recollection of the one moment in the basin, his pulses sang. Then, inside his pockets, his hands clenched, and he scourged himself for the lapse.

"I was in desperate need," she went on quickly. "There was a debt — a debt of honor — I wished to pay. And Mr. Foster told me you were interested in that desert land; that you were going to look it over. He caught me by long distance telephone the night he sailed for Alaska, to let me know. Oh, it all sounds sordid, but if you have ever come to the ragged edge of things —"

She stopped, with a little outward, deprecating movement of her hands, and turned again to meet Tisdale's look. But he was still silent. "I believed when you knew me," she went on, "you would see I am not the kind of woman you imagined; I even hoped, for David's sake, you would forgive me. But I did not know there was such friendship as yours in the world. I thought only mothers loved so, — the great ones, the Hagars, the Marys. It is more than that; it is the best and deepest of every kind of love in one. I can't fathom it — unless — men sometimes are born with twin souls."

It was not the influence of her personality now; it was not any magnetism. Something far down in the depths of him responded to that something in her. It was as though he felt the white soul of her rising transcendent over her body. It spoke in her pose, her eloquent face, and it filled the brief silence with an insistent, almost vibrant appeal.

"They are," he answered, and the emotion in his own

face played softly through his voice, "I am sure that they are. Weatherbee had other friends, plenty of them, scattered from the Yukon territory to Nome; men who would have been glad to go out of their way to serve him, if they had known; but he never asked anything of them; he saved the right to call on me. Neither of us ever came as near that 'ragged edge of things' as he did, toppled on it as he did, for so long. There never was a braver fight, against greater odds, single-handed, yet I failed him." He paused while his eyes again sought that high gorge of the Olympic Mountains, then added: "The most I can do now is to see that his work is carried on."

"You mean," she said not quite steadily, "you are going to buy that land?"

"I mean"—he frowned a little—"I am going to renew my offer to finance the project for you. You owe it to David Weatherbee even more than I do. Go back to that pocket; set his desert blossoming. It's your only salvation."

She groped for the bulwark behind her and moved back to its support. "I could not. I could not. I should go mad in that terrible place."

"Listen, madam." He said this very gently, but his voice carried its vibrant undertone as though down beneath the surface a waiting reserve force stirred. "I did not tell all about that orchard of spruce twigs. It was planted along a bench, the miniature of the one we climbed in the Wenatchee Mountains, that was crossed with tiny, frozen, irrigating canals leading from a basin; and midway stood a house. You must have known that trick he had of carving small things with his pocket-knife. Then imagine that delicately modeled house of snow. It was the nucleus of the whole, and before the door, fine as a cameo and holding a bundle in her arms, was set the image of a woman."

There was a silent moment. She waited, leaning a little forward, watching Tisdale's face, while a sort of incredulous surprise rose through the despair in her eyes. "There were women at Fairbanks and Seward after the first year," he went on. "Bright, refined women who would have counted it a privilege to share things, his hardest luck, with David Weatherbee. But the best of them in his eyes was nothing more than a shadow. There was just one woman in the world for him. That image stood for you. The whole project revolved around you. It would be incomplete now without you."

She shrank closer against the bulwark, glancing about her with the swift look of a creature trapped, then for a moment dropped her face in her hands. When she tried to say something, the words would not come. Her lips, her whole face quivered, but she could only shake her head in protest again and again.

Tisdale waited, watching her with his upward look from under contracted brows. "What else can you do?" he asked at last. "Your tract is too small to be handled by a syndicate, and now that the levels of the Columbia desert are to be brought under a big irrigation project, which means a nominal expense to the grower, your high pocket, unimproved, will hardly attract the single buyer. Will you, then, plat it in five-acre tracts for the Seattle market and invite the — interest of your friends?"

She drew erect; the danger signals flamed briefly in her eyes. "My friends can be dis-interested, Mr. Tisdale. It has only been through them, for a long time, I have been able to keep my hold."

"There's where you made your mistake at the start; in gaining that hold. When you conformed to their standards, your own were overthrown."

"That is not true." She did not raise her voice any; it dropped rather to a minor note, but a tremor ran over

her body, and her face for an instant betrayed how deep the shaft had struck. "And, always, when I have accepted a favor, I have given full measure in exchange. But there is an alternative you seem to have overlooked."

"I understand," he said slowly, and his color rose. "You may marry again." Then he asked, without protest: "Is it Foster?"

On occasion, during that long drive through the mountains, he had felt the varying height and thickness of an invisible barrier, but never, until that moment, its chill. Then Marcia Feversham called her, and she turned to go down the deck. "I'm coming!" she answered and stopped to look back. "You need not trouble about Mr. Foster," she said. "He — is safe."

CHAPTER XVII

“ALL THESE THINGS WILL I GIVE THEE”

FREDERIC had suggested a rubber at auction bridge.

Elizabeth fixed another pillow under his shoulders and moved the card table to his satisfaction, then took a chair near the players and unfolded her crochet, while Tisdale, whose injured hand excluded him from the game, seated himself beside her. He asked whimsically if she was manufacturing a cloud like the one in the west where the sun had set; but she lacked her sister's ready repartee, and, arresting her needle long enough to glance at him and back to the woolly, peach-pink pile in her lap, answered seriously: “It's going to be a hug-me-tight.”

The lieutenant laughed. “Sounds interesting, does it not?” he said, shuffling the cards. “But calm yourself, sir; a hug-me-tight is merely a kind of sweater built on the lines of a vest.”

He dealt, and Mrs. Feversham bid a lily. From his position Tisdale was able to watch Mrs. Weatherbee's face and her cards. She held herself erect in a subdued excitement as the game progressed; the pink flush deepened and went and came in her cheek; the blue lights danced in her eyes. Repeatedly she flashed intelligence to her partner across the board. And the lieutenant began to wait in critical moments for the glance. They won the first hand. Then it became apparent that he and Morganstein were betting on the side, and Marcia remonstrated. “It isn't that we are scrupulous alone,” she said, “but we lose inspiration playing second fiddle.”

"Come in then," suggested Frederic and explained to the lieutenant: "She can put up a hundred dollars and lose 'em like a soldier."

"The money stayed in the family," she said quickly. "Beatriz, it is your bid."

Mrs. Weatherbee was calculating the possibilities of her hand. Her suit was diamonds; seven in sequence from the jack. She held also the three highest in clubs and the other black king. She was weak in hearts. "I bid two diamonds," she said slowly, "and, Marcia, it's my ruby against your check for three hundred dollars."

There was a flutter of surprise. "No," remonstrated Elizabeth sharply. "No, Marcia can buy the ring for what it is worth."

"Then I should lose the chance to keep it. Three hundred will be enough to lose." And she added, less confidently: "But if you should win, Marcia, it is understood you will not let the ring go out of your hands."

"I bear witness," cried the lieutenant gallantly, "and we are proud to play second when a Studevaris leads."

But Morganstein stared at her in open admiration. "You thoroughbred!" he said.

"It shall stay in the family," confirmed Marcia.

Then Frederic bid two lilies, the lieutenant passed and Mrs. Feversham raised to three hearts. She wavered, and Tisdale saw the cards tremble in her hand. "Four diamonds," she said at last. The men passed, and Marcia doubled. Then Morganstein led a lily, and the lieutenant spread his hand on the table. There were six clubs; in diamonds a single trey.

But Mrs. Weatherbee was radiant. She moved a little and glanced back at Elizabeth, inviting her to look at her hand. She might as well have said: "You see, I have only to lead out trumps and establish clubs."

Marcia played a diamond on her partner's second lead

of spades, and led the ace of hearts, following with the king; the fourth round Frederic trumped over Mrs. Weatherbee and led another lily. Mrs. Feversham used her second diamond and, returning with a heart, saw her partner trump again over Mrs. Weatherbee. It was miserable. They gathered in the book before the lead fell to her. The next deal the cards deserted her, and after that the lieutenant blundered. But even though the ruby was inevitably lost, she finished the rubber pluckily; the flush deepened in her cheek; the blue fires flamed in her eyes. "You thoroughbred!" Morganstein repeated thickly. "You thoroughbred!"

To Tisdale it was unendurable. He rose and crossed to the farther side of the desk. The *Aquila*, rounding the northern end of Bainbridge Island, had come into Agate Pass; the tide ran swift in rips and eddies between close wooded shores, but these things no longer caught his attention. The scene he saw was the one he had put behind him, and in the calcium light of his mind, one figure stood out clearly from the rest. Had he not known this woman was a spendthrift? Had he not suspected she inherited this vice from her father, that old gambler of the stock exchange. Was it not for this reason he had determined to hold that last half interest in the Aurora mine? Still, still, she had not shown the skill of long practice; she had not played with ordinary caution. And had not Elizabeth remonstrated, as though her loss was inevitable? Every one had been undeniably surprised. Why, then, had she done this? She had told him she was in "desperate need." Could this have been the alternative to which she had referred?

The *Aquila's* whistle blew, and she came around, close under a bluff, into a small cove, on the rim of which rose the new villa. The group behind Tisdale began to push back chairs. He turned. The game was over, and Mrs.

Feversham stood moving her hand slowly to catch the changing lights of the ring on her finger. Then she looked at the loser. "It seems like robbery," she exclaimed, "to take this old family talisman from you, Beatriz. I shall make out a check to ease my conscience."

"Oh, no." She lifted her head bravely like his Alaska flower in the bitter wind. "I shall not accept it. My grandfather believed in the ruby devoutly," she went on evenly. "It was his birthstone. And since it is yours too, Marcia, it should bring you better fortune than it has brought me. But see! The villa roof is finished and stained moss-green as it should be, against that background of firs. And isn't the big veranda delightful, with those Venetian blinds?"

The yacht nosed alongside the little stone quay, and preceded by the host, who was carried ashore in his chair, not without difficulty, by relays of his crew, the party made the landing.

Tisdale's first impression when he stepped over the threshold of the villa was of magnitude. A great fireplace built of granite blocks faced the hospitable entrance, and the interior lifted to the beamed roof, with a gallery midway, on which opened the upper rooms. The stairs rose easily in two landings, and the curving balustrade formed a recess in which was constructed a stage. Near this a pipe organ was being installed. It was all luxurious, created for entertainment and pleasure, but it lacked the ostentatious element for which he was prepared.

It had been understood that the visit was made at this time to allow Mrs. Feversham an opportunity to go through the house. She was to decide on certain furnishings which she was to purchase in New York, but it was evident to Tisdale that the items she listed followed the suggestions of the woman who stood beside her, weighing with subdued enthusiasm the possibilities of the

room. "Imagine a splendid polar-bear rug here," she said, "with a yellowish lynx at the foot of the stairs, and one of those fine Kodiak skins in front of the hearth. A couch there in the chimney corner, with a Navajo blanket and pillows would be color enough."

Morganstein, watching her from his invalid chair, grasped the idea with satisfaction. "Cut out those Wilton carpets, Marcia," he said. "I'll write that Alaska hunter, Thompson, who heads the big-game parties, to send me half a dozen bears. They mount 'em all right in Seattle. Now see what we are going to need in that east suite up-stairs."

They went trooping up the staircase, but Hollis did not hurry to follow. His glance moved to the heavy, recumbent figure of his host. He was looking up across the banisters at Mrs. Weatherbee as she ascended, and something in his sensuous face, the steady gleam of his round black eyes, started in Tisdale's mind a sudden suspicion. She stopped to look down from the gallery railing and smiled with a gay little salute. Then Elizabeth called, and she disappeared through an open door.

"I'd give fifty dollars to see her face when she gets to that east room," Morganstein said abruptly. "But go up, Mr. Tisdale; go up. Needn't bother to stay with me."

"There's a good deal to see here," Tisdale responded genially. "A man who is accustomed to spend his time as I do, gathering accurate detail, is slower than others, I suppose, and this all seems very fine to me."

"It's got to be, fine,—the finest bungalow on Puget Sound, I keep telling the architect. Nothing short of that will do. Listen!" he added in a smothered voice, "she's in there now."

The vaulted roof carried the echoes down to Tisdale as he went up the stairs. All the doors were open along the gallery; some were not yet hung, but he walked directly

to the last one from which the exclamations of surprise had come. And, as he went, he heard Mrs. Weatherbee say: "It was glorious, like this, the day the idea flashed to my mind; but I did not dream Mr. Morganstein would alter the casement, for the men were hanging the French windows. Why, it must have been necessary to change the whole wall. Still, it was worth it, Marcia, was it not?"

"It certainly is unique," admitted Mrs. Feversham. Then Tisdale stopped on the threshold, facing a great window of plate glass in a single pane, designed to frame the incomparable view of Mount Rainier lifting above the sea. And it was no longer a phantom mountain; the haze had vanished, and the great peak loomed near, sharply defined, shining in Alpine splendor.

It was a fine conceit, too fine to have sprung from Morganstein's materialistic brain, and Tisdale was not slow to grasp the truth. The financier had reconstructed the wall to carry out Mrs. Weatherbee's suggestion. Then it came over him that this whole building, feature by feature, had been created to win, to ensnare this woman. It was as though the wall had become a scroll on which was written: "'All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down'—and marry me."

Suddenly the place oppressed him. He walked through the room to the smaller one of the suite and out on a broad sleeping-porch. The casement was nearly waist high, and he stood grasping the ledge and looking with unseeing eyes into a grove of firs. So this was the alternative. And this was why Foster was safe. The young mining engineer, with little besides his pay, had fallen far short of her price.

But the salt wind was in his face; it quieted him. He began to notice the many small intruding influences of approaching night. The bough of a resinous hemlock,

soughing gently, touched his arm, and his hold on the shingles relaxed. He moved to rest the injured hand on the casing, and its throbbing eased. His glance singled out clumps of changing maple or dogwood that flamed like small fires on the slope. Then he caught the rhythm of the tide, breaking far down along the rocky bulkhead; and above, where a footbridge spanned a chasm, a cascade rippled in harmony.

"Nice, isn't it?" said the lieutenant, who came onto the porch with Elizabeth.

"That is a pergola they are building down there," she explained. "It's to be covered with Virginia creeper and wistaria and all sorts of climbing things. And French doors open into it from the dining-room. A walk winds up from the end — you see it, Mr. Tisdale? — across the footbridge to a pavilion on the point. It is almost too dark to see the roof among the trees. Mrs. Weatherbee calls it the observatory, because we have such a long sweep of the Sound from there, north and south. You'd think you were aboard a ship at sea, lieutenant, in stormy weather. It gets every wind that blows."

The lieutenant wished to go to the pavilion, but Tisdale excused himself from joining them, and was left alone again with his thoughts. Then he was conscious the other women had remained in the apartment. They had come into the inner room, and Mrs. Feversham, having found an electric button, flooded the interior with light. On the balcony a blue bulb glowed. Tisdale turned a little more and, leaning on the casement, waited for them to come through the open door.

"What do you say to furnishing this suite in bird's-eye maple?" asked Marcia. "With rugs and portières in old blue."

Mrs. Weatherbee shaded her dazzled eyes with her hand and looked critically around. "The maple would be

lovely," she said, "but — do you know," and she turned to her companion with an engaging smile, "these sunrise rooms seem meant for Alaska cedar? And the rugs should be not old blue, but a soft, mossy blue-green."

Mrs. Feversham laughed. "Home industry again! We don't go to New York for Alaska cedar. But you are right; that pale yellow wood would be simply charming with these primrose walls, and it takes a wonderful polish. That leaves me only the rugs and hangings." She turned to go back through the wide doorway, then stopped to say: "After all, Beatriz, why not see what is to be had in Seattle? I had rather you selected everything for this suite, since it is to be yours."

"Mine?" She paused, steadying her voice, then went on with a swift breathlessness. "But I see, you mean to use when I visit you and Elizabeth. These rooms, from the first, have been my choice. But I am afraid I've been officious. I've been carried away by all this beautiful architecture and the pleasure of imagining harmonious, expensive furnishings. I never have fitted a complete house; it's years since I had a home. Then, too, you've spoiled me by listening to my suggestions. You've made me believe it was one way I could — well — cancel obligations."

Mrs. Feversham raised her hand and, turning it slowly, watched the play of light on the ruby. "There isn't a stone like this in America," she said. "You don't know how I've coveted it. But you need not have worried, Beatriz. I disposed of your note to Frederic."

"To Mr. Morganstein?" Her voice broke a little; she rocked unsteadily on her feet. It was as though a great wind had taken her unawares. Then, "I shall try to pay him as soon as possible," she said evenly. "I have the land at Hesperides Vale, you know, and if I do not sell it soon, perhaps he will take it for the debt."

Mrs. Feversham dropped her hand. "Beatriz! Beatriz!" she exclaimed. "You know there's an easier way. Come, it's time to stop this make-believe. You know Frederic Morganstein would gladly pay your debts, every one. You know he is building this villa for you; that he would marry you, now, to-day, if you would say the word. Yet you hold him at arm's-length; you are so conservative, so scrupulous about Public Opinion. But no one in Seattle would breathe a suggestion of blame. And it isn't as though you had worn first mourning. The wedding could be very quiet, with a long honeymoon to Japan or Mexico; both, if you wished. And you might come home to open this house with a reception late in May. The twilights are delightful then. Come, think, Bee! You've been irreproachable; the most exacting would admit that. And every one knows David Weatherbee practically deserted you for years."

Tisdale saw her mouth tremble. The quiver ran over her face, her whole body. For an instant her lashes fell, then she lifted them and met Marcia Feversham's calculating look. "It was not desertion," she said. "He contributed — his best — to my support. I took all he had to give. If ever you are where people are — talking — do me the favor to correct that mistake. And, now, if you please, Marcia, we will not bring David Weatherbee in any more."

Mrs. Feversham laughed a little. "I am willing, by-gones are by-gones, only listen to Frederic."

"You are mistaken, too, about Mr. Morganstein's motive, Marcia. He built this house for all his friends and Elizabeth's. He owes her something; she has always been so devoted to him." And she added, as she turned to go back to the gallery, "He knows I do not care to marry again."

Tisdale had not foreseen the personal drift to the con-

versation. And it had not occurred to him he was unobserved; the balcony light was directly over him, and he had waited, expecting they would come through to the porch, to speak to them. Now he saw that from where they had stopped in the brilliant interior, his figure must have blended into the background of hemlock boughs. If they had given him any thought, they had believed he had gone down with Elizabeth and the lieutenant. To have apologized, made himself known, after he grasped the significance of the situation, would only have resulted in embarrassment to them all. He allowed them time to reach the floor below. But the heat rose in his face. And suddenly, as his mind ran back over that interview in the bows of the *Aquila*, his question in regard to Foster seemed gross. Still, still, she had said she did "not care to marry again." That one fact radiated subconsciously through the puzzling thoughts that baffled him.

Behind him a few splendid chords rolled through the hall to the vaulted roof, then pealed forth the overture from Martha. That had been Weatherbee's favorite opera. Sometimes on long Arctic nights, when they were recalling old times and old songs, he himself had taken Plunkett's part to David's Lionel. He could see that cabin now, the door set wide, while their voices stormed the white silence under the near Yukon stars. His eyes gathered their absent expression. It was as though he looked beyond the park, far and away into other vast solitudes; saw once more the cliffs of Nanatuk looming through fog and heard clearly, booming across the ice, the great, familiar baritone.

The notes of the organ ceased. Tisdale stirred like a man roused from sleep. He turned and started through to the gallery. A woman's voice, without accompaniment, was singing Martha's immortal aria, *The Last Rose of Summer*. It was beautiful. The strains, sweet and

rich, flooded the hall and pervaded the upper rooms. Looking down from the railing, he saw Elizabeth and the lieutenant at the entrance below. The men who had installed the organ, were listening too, at the end of the hall, while beyond the open door the crew of the *Aquila* waited to carry the master aboard. As he reached the top of the stairs, Mrs. Feversham appeared, seated near the invalid in the center of the hall, and finally, as he came to the first landing, there was the diva herself, acknowledging the applause, sweeping backward with charming exaggeration from the front of the stage.

"Bravo!" shouted Frederic. "Bravo! Encore!"

She took the vacant seat at the organ, and the great notes of the *Good-night* chorus rolled to the rafters. Responding to her nodding invitation, the voices of the audience joined her own. It was inspiring. Tisdale stopped on the landing and involuntarily he caught up his old part.

"Tho' no prayer of mine can move thee
Yet I wish thee sweet good night;
Now good night, good night, good night!"

She looked up in quick surprise; her hands stumbled a little on the keys and, singing on, she subdued her voice to listen to his. Then, hesitating a little over the first chords, she began the final prelude, and Tisdale, waiting, heard her voice waver and float out soft and full:

"Ah, will Heaven indeed forgive me."

Her face was still lifted to him. It was as though her soul rose in direct appeal to him, and in that moment all his great heart went down to her in response.

It was over. Morganstein's heavy "Bravo!" broke the silence, followed by the enthusiastic clapping of hands.

Mrs. Weatherbee rose and started down the hall to join Elizabeth and the lieutenant, but Marcia detained her. "It was simply grand," she said. "I hadn't believed you had the reach or the strength of touch. This organ was certainly a fine innovation."

"Sure," said Frederic hazily. "It will make old Seattle sit up and take notice. Great idea; your schemes always are. Confess though, I had my doubts, when it came to this organ. I hedged and had that other jog built in over there for a piano. We can use it sometimes when we want to rag."

"It is a splendid instrument; much more expensive than I thought of, I am afraid. But," and she looked back at the elaborate array of pipes with the exhilaration showing in her face, "it's like giving the firs and the sea a new voice."

She passed on, and Frederic's glance followed her, puzzled, but with a blended respect and admiration. When she went out with Elizabeth and the lieutenant, he called his men to convey him to the yacht. Marcia walked beside him. Night had fallen, and the *Aquila* blazed like a fire ship. Her lamps sifted the shadows and threw long, wavering flames on the tide. Aft, where the table was spread, for the convenience of the host, who could not hazard the companionway, a string of electric lights illumined the deck. Japanese screens, a dropped awning or two, tempered the breeze, and the array of silver and flowers, and long-stemmed glasses, promised more than the informal little dinner to which Mrs. Feversham had referred.

She stood looking the table critically over, while the sailors settled the invalid's chair. While the rest of the party loitered in the bow, she turned to brother. "Has it occurred to you," she asked, "that Beatriz may be interested in some other man?"

"No," answered Frederic, startled. "No. Hadn't thought of that — unless — it's Foster."

"I don't know; he seems the most possible, if there's any one. She says she does not care to marry again. In any case, it is advisable to keep him in Alaska. You might send him on from the Iditarod to look over the Aurora mine." And she added slowly: "Beatriz Weatherbee, backed by the Morganstein money, will be able to carry the social end of the family anywhere; but Beatriz Weatherbee, holding a half interest in one of the best-paying placers in Alaska in her own right — is a wife worth straining a point for."

Frederic's round eyes widened; his face took an expression of childlike goodness; it was the mask with which he habitually covered his avarice. Then he said: "I understood Hollis Tisdale had exclusive, brass-bound, double-rivited possession of the Aurora."

"Hush," cautioned Marcia, "they are coming." And she added, in a still lower tone: "There is a loose rivet, but contrive to marry her before she knows."

That dinner covered the homeward cruise, and from the wharf Tisdale went directly to his rooms. There he telephoned the Rainier-Grand hotel. "Give me John Banks, please," he said. "Yes, I mean Lucky Banks of Alaska." And, after an interval, "Hello, Banks! This is Tisdale talking. I want you to come up to my rooms. Yes, to-night. I am starting east in the morning. Thank you. Good-by."

He put up the receiver and brought Weatherbee's box from the safe to the table under the hanging lamp. Seating himself, he took out the plan of the project and spread it before him. He had not closed the lid, and presently his eyes fell on David's watch. He lifted it and, hesitating to open it, sat trying to recall that picture in the lower case. He wondered how, once having

seen it, even in firelight and starshine, he could have forgotten it. The face would be younger of course, hardly more than a promise of the one he knew; still there would be the upward curling lashes, the suggestion of a fault in the nose, the piquant curve of the short, upper lip, and perhaps that pervading, illusive something that was the secret of her charm. "You were right, David, old man," he said at last, "it was a face to fight for, wait for. And madam, madam, a woman with a face like yours must have had some capacity for loving."

His hand was on the spring, but he did not press it. A noise outside in the corridor arrested him. He knew it was too soon for Banks to arrive, but he laid the watch back in the box and closed the lid. "You will never marry Frederic Morganstein," he said, and rising, began to walk the floor. "It would be monstrous. You must not. You will not. I shall not let you."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE OPTION

VIVIAN COURT stood on the first hill. The brick walls of the business center filled the levels below, and Mrs. Weatherbee's windows, like Tisdale's, commanded the inner harbor rimmed by Duwamish Head, with a broader sweep of the Sound beyond framed in wooded islands and the snow-peaks of the Olympic Peninsula. Southeastward, from her alcove, lifted the matchless, solitary crest of Rainier. It was the morning following the cruise on the *Aquila*, and Mrs. Weatherbee was taking a light breakfast in her room. The small table, placed near an open casement, allowed her to enjoy both views. She inhaled the salt breeze with the gentle pleasure of a woman whose sense has been trained, through generations, to fine and delicate perfumes; her eyes caught the sapphire sparkle of the sea, and her face had the freshness and warmth of a very young girl's. The elbow length of the sleeve exposed a forearm beautifully molded, with the velvety firmness of a child's; and the wistaria shade of her empire gown intensified the blue tones in the dark masses of her hair. In short, she stood for all that is refined, bright, charming in womanhood; and not for any single type, but a blending of the best in several; the "typical American beauty" that Miles Feversham had named her.

Her glance moved slowly among the shipping. The great steamship leaving the Great Northern docks was the splendid liner *Minnesota*, sailing for Japan; the outbound freighter, laden to the gunwales and carrying a

deckload of lumber, was destined for Prince William Sound. She represented Morganstein interests. And when her eyes moved farther, in the direction of the Yacht Club, there again was the *Aquila*, the largest speck in the moored fleet. A shadow crossed her face. She rose and, turning from the windows, stood taking an inventory that began with the piano, a Steinway mellowed by age, and ended at a quaint desk placed against the opposite wall. It was very old; it had been brought in her great-grandfather's time from Spain, and the carving, Moorish in design, had often roused the enthusiastic comment of her friends. Appraising it, her brows ruffled a little; the short upper lip met the lower in a line of resolve. She went to her telephone and found in the directory the number of a dealer in curios. But as she reached for the receiver, she was interrupted by a knock and, closing the book hastily, put it down to open the door.

A bell-boy stood holding a rare scarlet azalea in full flower. In its jardinière of Satsuma ware it was all his arms could compass, and a second boy followed with the costly Japanese stand that accompanied it. There was no need to read the name on the card tied conspicuously among the stiff leaves. The gift was from Frederic Morganstein. It had arrived, doubtless, on an Oriental steamer that had docked the previous evening while the *Aquila* made her landing. Mrs. Weatherbee had the plant placed where the sunshine reached it through the window of the alcove, and it made a gay showing against the subdued gray of the walls. Involuntarily her glance moved from it to the harbor, seeking the *Minnesota*, now under full headway off Magnolia Bluff. It was as though, in that moment, her imagination out-traveled the powerful liner, and she saw before her that alluring country set on the farther rim of the Pacific.

The steamship passed from sight; she turned from the window. The boy had taken away the breakfast tray and had left a box on the table. It was modest, violet-colored, with Hollywood Gardens stamped on the cover, but she hurried with an incredulous expectancy to open it. For an instant the perfume seemed to envelop her, then she lifted the green waxed paper, and a soft radiance shone in her face. It was only a corsage bouquet, but the violets, arranged with a few fronds of maidenhair, were delightfully fresh. She took them out carefully. For a moment she held them to her cheek. But she did not fasten them on her gown; instead she filled a cut-glass bowl with water and set them at the open casement in the shade. A cloud of city smoke, driving low, obscured the *Aquila*; the freighter bound for Prince William Sound rounded Magnolia Bluff, but clearly she had forgotten these interests; she stood looking the other way, through the southeast window, where Rainier rose in solitary splendor. A subdued exhilaration possessed her. Did she not in imagination travel back over the Cascades to that road to Wenatchee, where, rising to the divide, they had come unexpectedly on that far view of the one mountain? Then her glance fell again to the violets, and she lifted the bowl, leaning her cheek, her forehead, to feel the touch of the cool petals and inhale their fragrance.

She had not looked for Tisdale's card, but presently, in disposing of the florist's box, she found it tucked in the folds of waxed paper. He had written across it, not very legibly, with his left hand,

"I want to beg your pardon for that mistake I made. I know you never will put any man in David Weatherbee's place. You are going to think too much of him. When you are ready to make his project your life work, let me know."

She was a long time reading the note, going back to

the beginning more than once to reconsider his meaning. And her exhilaration died; the weariness that made her suddenly older settled over her face. At last she tore the card slowly in pieces and dropped it in the box.

Her telephone rang, and she went over and took down the receiver. "Mrs. Weatherbee," she said, and after a moment. "Yes. Please send him up."

The bell-boy had left the door ajar, and she heard the elevator when it stopped at her floor; a quick, nervous step sounded along the corridor, the door swung wider to some draught, and a short, wiry man, with a weather-beaten face, paused on the threshold. "I am Lucky Banks," he said simply, taking off his hat. "Mr. Tisdale asked me to see you got this bundle."

Involuntarily her glance rested on the hand that held the package in the curve of his arm, and she suppressed a shiver; the dread that the young and physically perfect always betray at the sight of deformity sprang to her eyes. "Thank you for troubling," she said, then, having taken the bundle, she waited to close the door.

But Banks was in no hurry. "It wasn't any trouble, my, no," he replied. "I was glad of the chance. It's a little bunch of stuff that was Dave's. And likely I'd have come up, anyhow," he added, "to inquire about a tract of land you own east of the mountains. I heard you talked of selling."

Instantly her face brightened. "Yes. But come in, will you not?" She turned and placed the package on the table, and took one of two chairs near the alcove. The azalea was so near that its vivid flowers seemed to cast a reflection on her cheeks. "I presume you mean my tract in the Wenatchee Mountains?" she went on engagingly. "A few miles above Hesperides Vale."

"Well, yes." Banks seated himself on the edge of the other chair and held his hat so as to conceal the maimed

hand. "I didn't know you had but one piece. It's up among the benches and takes in a kind of pocket. It's off the line of irrigation, but if the springs turn out what I expect, it ought to be worth sixty dollars an acre. And I want an option on the whole tract for ten thousand."

"Ten thousand dollars?" Her voice fluted incredulously. "But I am afraid I don't understand exactly what an option is. Please explain, Mr. Banks."

"Why, it's this way. I pay something down, say about three thousand, and you agree to let the sale rest for well, say six months, while I prospect the ground and see how it is likely to pan out. Afterwards, if I fail to buy, I naturally forfeit the bonus and all improvements."

"I see," she said slowly. "I see. But—you know it is wild land; you have been over the ground?"

"Not exactly, but I know the country, and I've talked with a man I can bank on, my, yes."

"How soon"—she began, then, covering her eagerness, said: "I agree to your option, Mr. Banks."

He laid his hat on the floor and took out his billbook, in which he found two printed blanks, filled according to his terms and ready for her signature. "I thought likely we could close the deal right up, ma'am, so's I could catch the Wenatchee train this afternoon. Your name goes here above mine."

She took the paper and started buoyantly to the secretary, but the little man stopped her. "Read it over, read it over," he cautioned. "All square, isn't it? And sign this duplicate, too. That's right. You're quite a business woman."

He laughed his high, mirthless laugh, and, taking a check from the bill-book, added some bright gold pieces which he stacked on the table carefully beside the package he had brought. "There's your three thousand," he said.

"It's out of a little bunch of dust I just turned in at the assay office."

"Thank you." She stood waiting while he folded his duplicate and put it away, but he did not rise to go, and after a moment, she went back to her chair by the scarlet azalea.

"They are doing really wonderful things in the Wenatchee Valley," she said graciously, willing to make conversation in consideration of that little pile of clean, new coin that had come so opportunely, "the apples are marvelous. But"—and here her conscience spoke—"you understand this tract is unreclaimed desert land; you must do everything."

"Yes, ma'am, I understand that; but what interests me most in that pocket is that it belonged to David Weatherbee. He mapped out a project of his own long before anybody dreamed of Hesperides Vale. He told me all about it; showed me the plans. That piece of ground got to be the garden spot of the whole earth to him; and I can't stand back and see it parcelled out to strangers."

He paused. The color deepened a little in her face; she looked away through the west window. "I thought an awful lot of Dave," he went on. "I'd ought to. Likely you don't know it—he wasn't the kind to talk much about himself—but I owe my life to him. *It* had commenced"—he held up the crippled hand and smiled grimly—"when Dave found me curled up under the snow, but he stayed, in the teeth of a blizzard, to see me through. And afterwards he lost time, weeks when hours counted, taking care of me,—operated when it came to it, like a regular doctor, my, yes. And when I got to crawling around again, I found he'd made me his partner."

"He had made a discovery," she asked, "while you were ill?"

"Yes, and you could bank on Dave it was a good one.

He knew the gravel every time. But we had to sell; it was the men who bought us out that struck it rich. You see, Dave had heavy bills pressing him down here in the States; he never said just what he owed, but he had to have the money. And, my, when he was doing the bulk of the work, I couldn't say much. It was so the next time and the next. We never could keep a claim long enough for the real clean-up. So, when I learned to use my hand, I cut loose to try it alone."

He halted again, but she waited in silence with her face turned to the harbor. "I drifted into the Iditarod country," he went on, "and was among the first to make a strike. It was the luckiest move I ever made, but I wish now I had stayed by Dave. I was only a few hundred miles away, but I never thought of his needing me. That was the trouble. He was always putting some other man on his feet, cheering the rest along, but not one of us ever thought of offering help to Dave Weatherbee. A fine, independent fellow like him.

"But I sure missed him," he said. "Many a time there in the Iditarod I used to get to wishing we had that voice of his to take the edge off of things. Why, back on the Tanana I've seen it keep a whole camp heartened; and after he picked me up in that blizzard, when I was most done for and couldn't sleep, it seemed like his singing about kept me alive. Sometimes still nights I can hear those tunes yet. He knew a lot of 'em, but there was *Carry Me Back to Old Virginny*, and *Heart Bowed Down*, and *You'll Remember Me*. I always thought that song reminded him of some girl down here in the States. He never told me so, always put me off if I said a word, and none of us knew he was married then; but when he got to singing that tune, somehow he seemed to forget us boys and the camp and everything, and went trailing off after his voice, looking for somebody clear

out of sight. I know now, since I've seen you, I was likely right."

Still she was silent. But she moved a little and lifted her hand to the edge of the Satsuma jardinière; her fingers closed on it in a tightening grip; she held her head high, but the lashes drooped over her eyes. Watching her, the miner's seamed face worked. After a moment he said: "The other night I paid seven dollars for a seat at the Metropolitan just to hear one of those first-class singers try that song. The scenery was all right. There were the boys and two or three women sitting around a camp-fire. And the fiddles got the tune fine, but my, my! I couldn't understand a word. Seemed like that fellow was talking darn Dago."

At this she lifted her eyes. The shadow of a smile touched her mouth, though her lashes were wet. "And he was, Mr. Banks," she said brightly. "He was. I know, because I was there."

Banks picked up his hat and rose to his feet. "We were all mighty proud of Dave," he said. "There wasn't one of us wouldn't have done his level best to reach him that last stampede; but I'm glad the chance came to Hollis Tisdale. There wasn't another man in Alaska could have done what he did. Yes, I'm mighty glad it was Tisdale who — found him." He paused, holding his hat over the crippled hand, then added: "I suppose you never knew what it means to be cold."

She rose. The smile had left her lips, and she stood looking into his withered face with wide eyes. "I mean so cold you don't care what happens. So cold you can lie down in your tracks, in a sixty-mile-an-hour blizzard and go to sleep."

"No." She shivered, and her voice was almost a whisper. "I am afraid not."

"Then you can't begin to imagine what Tisdale did."

You can't see him fighting his way through mountains, mushing ahead on the winter trail, breaking road for his worn-out huskies, alone day after day, with just poor Dave strapped to the sled."

She put her hands to her ears. "Please, please don't say any more," she begged. "I know — all — about it."

"Even about the wolves?"

She dropped her hands, bracing herself a little on the table, and turned her face, looking, with that manner of one helplessly trapped, around the room.

"Even about the wolves?" he persisted.

"No. No," she admitted at last.

He nodded. "I thought likely not. Hollis never told that. It goes against his grain to be made much of. He and Dave was cut out of the same block. But last night in the lobby to the hotel, I happened on a fellow that met him in the pass above Seward. There were four of 'em mushing through to some mines beyond the Susitna. It was snowing like blazes when they heard those wolves, and pretty soon Tisdale's dogs came streaking by through the smother. Then a gun fired. It kept up, with just time enough between shots to load, until they came up to him. He had stopped where a kind of small cave was scooped in the mountainside and put the sled in and turned the huskies loose. He had had the time, too, to make a fire in front of the hole, but when the boys got there, his wood was about burned out, and the wolves had got Dave's old husky, Jack. He had done his best to help hold off the pack. There's no telling how many Hollis killed; you see the rest fell on 'em soon's they dropped. It was hell. Nothing but hair and blood and bones churned into the snow far as you could see. Excuse me, ma'am; I guess it sounds a little rough. I'm more used to talking to men, my, yes. But the fellow who told me said Hollis knew well enough what was coming at the

start, when he heard the first cry of the pack. He had a chance to make a roadhouse below the pass. Not one man in a thousand would have stayed by that sled."

His withered face worked again. He moved to the door. "But Dave would have done it." His voice took a higher pitch. "Yes, ma'am, Dave would have done the same for Hollis Tisdale. They was a team; my, yes." He laughed his hard, mirthless laugh. "Well, so long," he said.

She did not answer. Half-way down the corridor Banks looked back through the open door. She had not moved from the place where he had left her, though her face was turned to the window. A little farther on, while he waited for the elevator, he saw she had taken the package he had brought from Tisdale. She stood weighing it, undecided, in her hands, then drew out the table drawer and laid it in. She paused another instant in uncertainty and, closing the drawer, began to gather up the pieces of gold.

CHAPTER XIX

LUCKY BANKS AND THE PINK CHIFFON

ON his way down from Vivian Court, the mining man's attention was caught by the great corner show window at Sedgewick-Wilson's, and instantly out of the display of handsome evening gowns his eyes singled a dancing frock of pink chiffon. "She always looked pretty," he told himself, "but when she wore pink — my!" and he turned and found his way through the swinging doors. A little later the elevator had left him at the second floor. For a moment the mirrors bewildered him; they gave a sense of vastness, repeating the elegant apartment in every direction, and whichever way he glanced there was himself, seated on the edge of a chair, his square shoes set primly on the thick green carpet, his hat held stiffly over the crippled hand. Then an imposing young woman sauntered towards him. "Well," she said severely, "what can I show you?"

Banks drew himself a little stiffer. "A dress," he said abruptly in his highest key, "ready-made and pink."

"What size?"

"Why" — the little man paused, and a blush that was nearer a shadow crossed his weather-worn face — "let me see. She's five feet seven and a quarter, in her shoes, and I judge a couple of inches wider through the shoulders than you." His glance moved to another saleswoman, who came a step nearer and stood listening, frankly amused. "You look more her figure," he added.

"Takes a thirty-eight." The first saleswoman brought

out a simple gown of pink veiling and laid it on the rack before Banks, and he leaned forward and took a fold between his thumb and forefinger, gravely feeling the texture.

"This is priced at twenty-five dollars," she said. "How does that suit?"

Banks drew himself erect. "There's one down-stairs in the front window I like better," he said.

The woman looked him shrewdly over. He had put his hat down, and her glance rested involuntarily on his maimed hand. "That pink chiffon is a hundred and twenty-five," she explained.

"I can stand it; the price doesn't cut any figure, if it's what I want." He paused, nodding a little aggressively and tapping the carpet with one square foot. "The lady it's for is a mighty good judge of cloth, and I want you to show me the best you've got."

She glanced at the other saleswoman, but she had turned her back—her shoulders shook—and she hurried to bring out a duplicate of the pink chiffon, which she arranged carefully on the rack. Bank's face softened; he reached to touch it with a sort of caress. "This is more like it," he said; then, turning to the second girl, "but I can tell better if you'll put it on. You don't seem very busy," he added quickly, "and I'll pay you your time."

"Why, that's all right," she answered and came to pick up the gown. "I'll be glad to; that's what I'm here for."

She disappeared, laughing, into a dressing-room, and presently the first saleswoman excused herself to wait on new customers. The girl came back transformed. She had a handsome brunette face, with merry dark eyes and a great deal of black hair arranged in an elaborate and striking coiffure. "Isn't it swell?" she asked, walking leisurely before him. "But you'll have to fasten it for her; it hooks in the back." Then she stopped; the fun

went out of her face; her glance had fallen to his crippled hand. "I'm awfully sorry," she stammered. "Of course she can manage it herself; we all have to sometimes."

But the little man was rapt in the gown. "I'll take it!" he said tremulously. "It suits you great, but, my! She'll be a sight."

"I'll bet she's pretty," said the girl, still trying to make amends. "I'd like to see her in this chiffon. And I guess your party will be swell."

Banks looked troubled. "It isn't a party; not exactly. You see she's been away from town quite a spell, and I thought likely she'd be a little short on clothes. I guess while I'm about it I may as well take along everything that naturally goes with this dress; shoes and socks and a hat and — flannels —"

He paused in uncertainty, for the girl had suddenly turned her back again. "I'd like to leave the rest to you," he added. "Pick out the best; the whole outfit straight through."

"I'll be glad to." The girl turned again, controlling a last dimple. "You are the thoughtfulest man I ever saw on this floor. She's in luck; but I guess you aren't married — yet."

Banks laughed his high, strained laugh and rose. "No," he answered briskly, "no, not exactly. But I want you to hurry out this bill of goods in time for the four-ten Great Northern. I can't go without it, and I'm counting on making Wenatchee to-night."

"Wenatchec?" exclaimed the girl. "Is that where you expect her to wear this chiffon? Why, it's the dustiest place under the sun. Take my word for it; I came from there. And, see here, they don't give big parties there; the people are just nice and friendly; it's a small town. If I were you I'd choose a tan; a veiling gown, like this first one we showed you, only tan. Then you could

put the difference in price into a coat;—we have some smart ones in tan,—with a light pongee duster to slip over it all, if she's driving or using a machine."

Banks nodded. "Sure, tuck them all in; but this pink dress goes, too, and see it's on top. Likely they'll go best in a trunk. Now, if you will give me the bill —"

He paused to take out his poke, but the girl laughed. "I can't," she said. "It will take me half an hour to foot it all up after I've picked out the things. And unless you give me a limit, I won't know where to stop. Then there's the hat. I never would dare to choose that for a woman I've never seen, unless she's my style."

"She is," the little man answered gravely, "that's why I picked you out when I first come in. I guess maybe the other one was nice all right, but she was a little too dried-up and froze to do."

"Then I know what I'd like to send; it's a hat I tried on this morning. A nice taupe — that's about the color of that sage-brush country over there and won't show the dust — and it's trimmed with just one stunning plume the same shade and a wreath of the tiniest pink French roses set under the velvet brim. It looked like it was made for me, but twelve and a half is my limit and it's twenty-five dollars. Maybe you don't want to go that high."

Banks untied the poke and poured the remaining gold pieces on the show-case; then he found a pocket-book from which he took several crisp bills. "There's three hundred," he said briefly, "and another ten for the trunk. I want you to pick out a nice little one I can stow in the back of a one-seated automobile. The hat and this pink dress go on top; and be sure you get the outfit down to that four-ten train. Good-by," he put out his hand, and a gleam of warmth touched his bleak face. "I'm glad I met you."

"And so am I. Good-by." She stopped gathering up the money long enough to give him her hand. "And good luck," she added.

The first saleswoman, again at leisure, approached and stood looking after him as he hurried with his quick, uneven steps towards the elevator. "Of all things!" she exclaimed. "He did buy that pink chiffon. Who'd ever have thought he had the money or the taste. But I suppose he's one of those lucky fellows who've struck it rich in Alaska."

The other young woman nodded. "His gold came out of one of those pokes, and it's fresh from the mint. But I guess he's earned all he's got, every cent. I'll bet he's starved and froze; suffered ways we don't know. And he's spending it on a girl. I'd like to see her. Maybe she's the cold-blooded kind that'll snub him and make fun of this chiffon."

She turned into the dressing-room, and it was then Banks stopped and brought out the loose change in his pockets. There was a ten dollar piece, to which he added two and a half in silver. He started back up the room, but the girl had disappeared, and, while he stood hesitating, a floor-walker approached.

"Have you forgotten something?" he asked politely.

"Yes," answered Banks, "I forgot to give this money to the young lady who was waiting on me. She's likely gone to take off a pink dress I bought. But she's the one with lots of black hair and pink cheeks and a real nice smile; you couldn't miss her. And you might as well give her this; tell her it's the other twelve and a half to make up the price of that hat; a duplicate of the one we were talking about. She'll understand."

He called these final words over his shoulder, for the elevator had stopped, and he hurried to catch it. Going

down, he looked at his watch; he had spent an hour buying that dress. But on the lower floor he noticed a telephone booth and saw a way to make up the time. "Hello!" he called, pitching his voice to a treble. "This is Banks, the miner you was trying to talk into buying that little red car last week; roadster I think you said 'twas. Well, I want you to fire up and run down to the Rainier-Grand quick as you can."

He listened a moment, then: "Yes, likely I'll change my mind, if I get so's I can drive her all right by three P. M. I'm going east of the mountains, and if I buy I've got to ship her on the four-ten train — Yes, I mean the little one with a seat to accommodate two, with a place to carry a trunk behind. Now get busy and rush her down. I've got some errands to do, and I want you to hurry me around; then we'll get away from the crowd out on the boulevard where I can have a clear track to break her on."

The sale was made, and the mining man must have applied himself successfully to his lesson, for the following morning, when the red car spun out of Wenatchee and up the lifting valley road, a snug steamer-trunk was stowed in the box behind, and Banks at the steering gear was traveling alone. To be sure the rising curves were made in sudden spurts and jerks, but his lack of skill was reinforced by a tireless vigilance gathered through breaking days of driving and mushing over hazardous trails. And he had made an early start; few wayfarers were yet astir. But at last, high up where the track doubled the summit of a slope that lifted in a bluff overhead, and on the other hand dropped precipitously to the river, the little man barely averted catastrophe. The driver and the vehicle were hidden by the curve, but at his warning honk, two percherons that blocked the way halted and, lunging at his repeated note, crowded back on the team they led.

Then a woman's voice shrilled: "I've got the heaviest load; you give me right of way."

Banks sprang out and ran forward past the horses. The driver, dressed in a skirt and blouse of khaki, was seated on a load of lumber. She held the reins high in yellow-gauntleted hands, and a rope of loosened red hair hung below a smart campaign hat. "I can't back," she exclaimed aggressively. "You got to give me right of way."

"Ain't there a man with the outfit?" he asked uncertainly.

"No," she snapped. "Do I look like I need one?" But she hurried on tremulously: "My husband's running the mill night and day, and Bryant, down the valley, had to have his boxes for the apple crop. He said send the boards down, and he'd let a couple of his Japs knock 'em together. So I thought with an early start and a clear track, I could drive. But you've got to turn out. I've got the heavy load."

Banks shook his head.

"It's my first trip," he said dubiously, "and I ain't learned to back her only enough to turn 'round; and it's too narrow. But I used to drive pretty good seven or eight years ago; and I've been managing a dog team off and on ever since. Let me climb up there and back your load."

"You can't do it," she cried. "It's up-grade and a mean curve, and that nigh leader, for a first-class draught horse, has the cussedest disposition you ever saw. You can't back him short of a gunshot under his nose, and you got to get that buzz-wagon of yours out of sight before I can get him past."

"Then," said Banks, and smiled grimly, "I guess it's up to me to back." He started to return to the machine but paused to add over his shoulder: "It's all right;

don't you be scared. No matter what happens, you forget it and drive straight ahead."

But destiny, who had scourged and thwarted the little man so many years, was in a humorous mood that day. The little red car backed down from the bend in zigzag spurts, grazing the bluff, sheering off to coast the riverward brink; then, in the final instant, when the machine failed to respond to the lever speedily enough, a spur of rock jutting beyond the roadway eased the outer wheel. It rolled up, all but over, while the next tire met the obstruction and caught. Banks laughed. "Hooray!" he piped. "Now swing the corner, lady! All circle to the left."

"Get up!" the driver shrilled. "Get up, now, Duke, you imp!" And the leader, balking suspiciously at the explosive machine, felt a smart touch of the whip. He plunged, sidled against the bluff and broke by. There was barely room to make that turn; the tailboard of the wagon, grating, left a long blemish on the bright body of the car, but as the load rolled on down the incline, Banks churned gayly up around the bend.

In less than an hour Hesperides Vale stretched behind him, and the bold front of Cerberus lifted holding the gap. Tisdale had warned him of the barbed-wire fence, and while he cautiously rounded the mountain, his old misgiving rose. What though he had made good; what though the Iditarod had filled his poke many times over, the north had taken heavy toll. He had left his youth up there, and what would this smart little automobile count against a whole right hand? And this trunkful of clothes — what would it weigh against a good-sized man? Still, still, though she might have taken her pick of 'em all, Annabel had never married, and she had kept his goats. Then he remembered Tisdale had said that she too had had a hard fight, and the years must have changed her.

And hadn't she herself told him, in that letter he carried in his breast pocket, that if he cared to come and see the goats, he would find his investment was turning out fine, but he needn't expect she had kept her own good looks?

The little man smiled with returning confidence and, lifting his glance, saw the cabin and the browsing flock cut off by the barbed-wire fence from the road. Then as he brought the car to a stop, the collie flew barking against the wicket, and a gaunt woman rose from a rock and stood shading her eyes from the morning sun.

He sprang down and spoke to the dog, and instantly his tone quieted the collie, but the woman came nearer to point at the sign. "You better read that," she threatened.

His hand dropped from the wicket, and he stood staring at her across the barbed wire. "I was looking for a lady," he said slowly, "but I guess likely I've made a mistake."

She came another step and, again shading her eyes, stared back. A look half eager, half wistful, trembled for a moment through the forbidding tenseness of her face. "All the men I've seen in automobiles up here were looking for land," she replied defiantly.

He nodded; his eyes did not move from her face, but they shone like two chippings of blue glacier ice, and his voice when he spoke piped its sharpest key. "So am I. I've got an option on a pocket somewheres in this range, and the lady I'm inquiring for happened to homestead the quarter below. It sort of overlaps, so's she put her improvements on the wrong edge. Yes, ma'am, I've likely made a mistake, but, you see, I heard she had a bunch o' goats."

There was a brief silence then. "Anyhow, you must o' come from that surveyor," she said. "Maybe he was just a smooth talker, but he had a nice face; laughing crinkles around his eyes and a way of looking at you, if

you'd done a mean thing, to make you feel like the scum of the earth. But he happened to be acquainted with the man that made me a present of my first billy and ewes, and you — favor him a little." She paused, then went on unsteadily, while her eyes continued to search him. "He was about your size, but he's been up in Alaska, way in the interior somewheres for years, and the letter I wrote him couldn't have reached him inside a month. I figured if he came out, he would just about catch the last steamer in October."

"So he would, if he hadn't come down to Seattle already." He stopped, fumbling with the pin, and threw open the wicket. "I guess I ain't changed much more'n you, Annabel."

The woman was silent. Her chin dropped; her glance sought the earth. Then Banks turned to fasten the gate behind him, and she started to stalk mechanically up the field towards the cabin. "I feel all broke up," he said, overtaking her; "like I'd been struck by a blizzard. Why, there was a girl down in Seattle, she sold me a bill of goods that looked more like you than you do yourself. I know I got myself to blame, but I never counted for a minute on your keeping the goats."

The woman stalked on a little faster, but she could not outstrip the prospector; she turned her face, in refuge, to the flock. "Goats," she said unsteadily, "goats — are all right when you get used to 'em. They're something like children, I guess; a sight of trouble but good company and mighty comforting to have 'round. And they're just as different. There's old Dad, the cautious looking one standing off there watching us and chewing the end of a thistle. It might as well be a toothpick, and I'll bet he's thinking: 'You can't get the best of me, no, sir.' And that piece of wisdom next to him is the Professor. Don't he remind you of the old schoolmaster down

at the Corners? And there goes Johnny Banks. See him? The pert little fellow chasing up the field. You never can tell where he'll turn up or what he'll do next."

She laughed a dry, forced laugh, and Banks echoed it in his strained key. "But we are going to get rid of 'em. They're a fine bunch — you've brought 'em up splendid, made a sight better showing than I could — but we are going to get rid of 'em, yes, ma'am, and forget 'em as quick's we can. We are going to start right now to make up those seven years."

They had reached the cabin, and he stopped on the threshold. "My, my," he said softly, "don't it look homey? There's your Dad's old chair, and the dresser and the melodion. I was 'fraid you'd sold that, Annabel."

"I could have, there's been plenty of chances, but Dad gave it to me, don't you remember? the Christmas I was sixteen."

"My, yes, and you opened it right there, under the cherry tree, and started *Home, Sweet Home*. I can hear it now, and the crowd joining in. I'm glad you kept it, Annabel; a new one wouldn't seem just the same."

"It's traveled though. You ought to have seen me moving from Oregon. The old delivery wagon was heaping full." Her laugh this time was spontaneous. "And old Kate couldn't make more than ten miles a day. But I had a good tent, and when she had done her day's stunt, I just tied her out to feed and made camp. The hardest was keeping track of the goats, but the flock was small then, and I had two dogs."

"I see," said Banks. "You kept 'em ahead of the wagon when you was on the road and let 'em forage for themselves. But I'd like to have a look at old Kate. She came of good stock."

Annabel went over and, seating herself in her father's chair, untied her sunbonnet. "Kate died," she said. "I

hired her out to a man down the valley, and he worked her too hard in the heat."

There was a silent moment. She took off the bonnet and laid it in her lap. The light, streaming through a small window, touched her hair, which was bound in smooth, thick braids around her head.

"My, my," the little man said, "ain't it a sight? I'd have known you in a minute without that bonnet down at the gate. My, but don't it make a difference what a woman wears? I'll bet I can't tell you from the girl I left in Oregon when you've changed your clothes."

She shook her head. "This denim is all I've got," she said, with a touch of defiance. "I wore out all I had; goats are hard on clothes."

"I thought likely." His bleak face began to glow. "And I knew you was out of town away from the stores, so's I brought along a little outfit. You wait a minute, and I'll fetch it right in."

He was gone before he finished speaking and returned in an incredibly short time with the trunk, which he deposited on the floor before her. Then he felt in his pocket and, finding the key, fitted it and lifted the lid. It was then, for the first time, she noticed the maimed hand.

"Johnny!" she cried, and the pent emotion surged in her voice. "Johnny, you've been — hurt."

"Oh, that don't amount to anything now, only the looks. I can turn out just as much work."

He hurried to open the tray, but before he could remove the packing of tissue paper that enveloped the hat, she reached and took the crippled hand between her own. Her fingers fluttered, caressing, while with maternal protectiveness they covered it, and she drew him back to the broad arm of her chair. The defiance had gone out of her face; her eyes were misty and tender. "You tell me what happened," she said.

So came Lucky Banks' hour. He saw this woman who had been fond of pretty clothes, who had once worn them but was now reduced to a single frock of coarse denim, turn from the fine outfit before it was even displayed; waiting, with a wondrously comforting solicitude he never had suspected in the girl whom he had left in Oregon, to hear first that miserable story of the trail. He told it briefly, but with the vividness of one whose words are coined straight from the crucible of bitter experience, and while she listened, her heart shone in her passionate eyes. "What if it had happened," she broke out at last. "If it had, Johnny, it would have been my fault. I drove you into going up there. I'm responsible for this hand. I—I couldn't have stood worse than that."

The little man beamed. "Is that so, Annabel? Then I'm mighty glad Weatherbee followed that stampede. Nobody else would have seen my hand sticking up through the snow and stopped to dig me out. Unless—" he added thoughtfully, "it was Hollis Tisdale. Yes, likely Hollis would. He was the only man in Alaska fit to be Dave's running mate."

"Do you mean that surveyor?" she asked.

Banks nodded.

"I thought so," she said with satisfaction. "Dad taught me to size people up on sight. He could tell the first minute he saw a man's face whether he was good for a bill of groceries or not; and I knew that surveyor was straight. I bet he knew you was in Seattle when he got me to write. But I wish I could have a look at the other one. He must be—great."

Banks nodded again. "He was," he answered huskily. "He was. But he's made his last trip. I wasn't three hundred miles off, but I never thought of Dave Weatherbee's needing help; it took Tisdale, clear off in Nome,

over a thousand miles, to sense something was wrong. But he started to mush it, alone with his huskies, to the Iditarod and on to the Aurora, Dave's mine. You don't know anything about that winter trail, Annabel. It means from twenty to fifty below, with the wind swooping out of every canyon, cross-cutting like knives, and not the sign of a road-house in days, in weeks sometimes. But he made it,"—Banks' voice reached high pitch—"He beat the records, my, yes."

"And something was wrong?" asked Annabel, breaking the pause.

Banks nodded again. "You remember that sheepman down in Oregon they brought in from the range. The one that ripped up his comforter that night at the hotel and set the wool in little rolls around the floor; thought he was tending sheep? Well, that's what was happening. And Hollis was two days late. Dave had started for the coast; not the regular way to Fairbanks and out by stage to Valdez, but a new route through the Alaska Range to strike the Susitna and on to Seward. And he had fresh dogs. He was through Rainy Pass when Tisdale began to catch up."

"He did catch up?" Annabel questioned again hurriedly.

Banks nodded once more. He drew his hand away and rose from his seat on the chair arm. His eyes were shining like blue glacier ice. "It was in a blizzard; the same as the day I lost my fingers—only—Hollis—he was too late." He turned and walked unsteadily to the door and stood looking out. "I wasn't three hundred miles from the Aurora," he added. "I could have been in time. I can't ever forget that."

Annabel rose and stood watching him, with the emotion playing in her face. "Johnny!" she exclaimed at last. "Oh, Johnny!" She went over and put her arm pro-

tectively around his shoulders. "I know just how you feel; but you didn't drive him to it. You were just busy and interested in your work. You'd have gone in a minute, left everything, if you had known."

"That's it; I ought to have known. I ought to have kept track of Dave; run over once in a while to say hullo. I'd have likely seen it was coming on, then, in time. When Tisdale found him, he'd been setting out little pieces of spruce, like an orchard in the snow. You see," he added after a moment, "Dave always expected to come back here when he struck it rich and start a fruit ranch. He was the man who owned this pocket."

A sudden understanding shone in Annabel's face. "And that's why you got an option on it; you want to carry out his scheme. I'll help you, Johnny, I'll do my level best."

Banks turned and looked at her. "That's all I want, Annabel. I was a little afraid you'd be sick of the place. But, my, we can go right ahead and set a crew of men to grubbing out the sage on both sections to once. Folks might have said, seeing you take up with a undersized, froze-up fellow like me, you was marrying me for my money; but they can't, no, ma'am, not when they see the valuable claim you are developing in your own right."

Annabel laughed. "I guess you're entitled to your turn making fun of me. But have you got money, Johnny? I never thought of that."

"Likely not. But the Annabel sure brought me luck; that name worked better than a rabbit's foot. Here's a little bunch of nuggets I saved out of the first clean-up." He paused to take a small new poke from an inner pocket and, untying the string, poured the contents in her hand. "I thought likely you'd want 'em made up in a necklace with a few diamonds or mebbe emeralds mixed in."

She stood looking at the shining rough pieces of gold in her palm, while a certain pride rose through the wonder in her face. "My gracious!" she exclaimed, and a spark of her lost youth revived. "My gracious. And you named your mine after me. I bet it was on account of that billy and the ewes."

"Likely," the little man beamed. "But more than likely it was because that strike was a sure thing, and you was behind it, Annabel. My, yes, you was responsible I ever got to Alaska; let alone stuck it out. Sure as a grubstake, you gave me my start. Now come take a look at this outfit I brought."

He held the poke open while she poured the nuggets back. "I like them plain," she said, "but I never saw any made up. I leave it to you."

"Then I make it emeralds to match the Green, and mebbe a few sparklers thrown in." He laughed gayly and, taking her arm, drew her back across the room to the open trunk; when she was seated again in the armchair, he knelt to remove the first layer of tissue packing. She took the precaution to spread one smooth sheet of it on her lap and, leaning forward, saw him uncover the plume, the entire hat. "Gracious goodness!" she exclaimed tremulously, as he lifted it awkwardly to her eager hands, "ain't it splendid? I didn't know they were making them like this. I never saw such roses; why, they look alive and ready to smell; and ain't they pretty fixed this way under the brim?" She paused, turning the masterpiece slowly, like a connoisseur. "I bet I could have worn it when I was in Oregon. It would have been my style. Do you suppose"—she glanced at Banks timidly—"I'd dare to try it if my hair was done real nice, and I had on a better dress?"

"My, yes." Banks laughed again excitedly, and with growing confidence opened the next compartment to display

the chiffon gown. "Wait till you get this on. You'll be a sight. You always was in pink." He paused to take the hat and, wheeling, placed it on the old dresser, and so made room for the frock on her lap. "Now, ain't that soft and peachy and — and rich?"

But Annabel was silent. She lifted her eyes from the gown to Johnny, and they were full of mist. Then her lip quivered, and a drop splashed down on the delicate fabric. "My gracious!" she cried in consternation and, rising, held the gown off at arm's-length. "Do you suppose it's going to spot?"

And Banks' laugh piped once more. "I guess it can stand a little salt water," he replied. "But if it can't, we can get a duplicate. And now you just take your time and pick out what you want to wear. I am going up the bench to look around and find Dave's springs. It'll likely take me an hour or so, and you can be ready to start soon's I get back."

"Start?" she repeated. "Was you counting on going somewhere?"

"My, yes. I was counting on taking you a little spin down to Wenatchee the first thing, and having a chicken dinner to the hotel. Then, soon's we get a license and hunt up a sky man, we are going to run down to Oregon and have a look at the old Corners."

"I never rode in an automobile," she said, glowing, "but I think I'd like it fine."

"I bet you will. I bet, coming home, you'll be running the machine yourself half the time."

He hurried away then, laughing his shrillest key, and Annabel laid the pink chiffon back in the tray to follow him to the door. She stood smiling, though the mist alternately gathered and cleared in her eyes, watching him up the vale and waiting to see him reappear on the front of the bench. But he found her ready when he returned;

and the hat was becoming beyond her hopes. It brought back in a measure the old brightness that was half a challenge in her air, so that, to the mining man, she seemed to have gone back, almost, those lost years. Still, his satisfaction was tempered, and instantly she understood the cause. "The roses seemed enough pink to-day," she said tactfully, "till I wear off some of this tan. But I like this tan cloth awful well, don't you? It's a nice color for out-of-doors and won't show the dust. And doesn't it fit perfectly splendid? And look at these shoes. I don't see how you remembered my size. You've thought of everything. There's even an automobile veil. A lady that came out here with Mr. Tisdale had one about the same shade. But you'll have to help me put it on so I won't spoil this plume."

She pushed the pongee coat, which was carefully folded across the back of a chair, a little aside and, seating herself before the mirror, reached to take the scarf and exposed a folded paper on the dresser. "I found that envelope pinned inside the hat," she said still diplomatically, though a touch of humor shaded her lips. "There's a ten dollar piece in it and two and a half in silver. Probably it's your change."

But Banks turned the envelope and read pencilled across the front: "There isn't any duplicate, but thanks just the same."

CHAPTER XX

KERNEL AND PEACH

AFTER that little wedding journey down in Oregon, Banks returned to Seattle to engage a crew for the first step to reclamation; combining pleasure with business, he brought Annabel and registered at the New Washington Hotel. And here Daniels, detailed to learn something in regard to the Iditarod strike where, it was rumored, the Morgansteins were negotiating for the miner's valuable holdings, finally traced him.

"Sure we have a Banks of Alaska with us," the clerk responded, smiling, and turned the page to show the *Press* representative the strained, left-handed signature. "He's a sawed-off specimen with a face like a peachstone; but he said if he put down his regular name, the boys likely would miss his trail."

"Mrs. Annabel Green Banks Hesperides Vale," read Jimmie.

"Lucky Banks Iditarod and Hesperides Vale.

"This looks like my man, sure; but who is Mrs. Green-Banks? His wife or mother?"

"Bride," the clerk replied laconically. "It's a sort of overdue honeymoon. But she's rather smart looking; fine eyes and tall enough to make up for him. They're a pair."

"I see. Kernel and peach. But Hesperides Vale," Daniels went on thoughtfully. "Why, that's in the new fruit belt over near Wenatchee, my old stamping-ground."

The clerk nodded. "She owns some orchard lands over there and to hear him talk, you'd think she had the money.

Until it comes to ordering; then the Queen of Sheba isn't in it. 'I guess we can stand the best room in the house,' he says. And when I showed them the blue suite and told them Tarquina, the prima donna opening at the Metropolitan to-night, had the companion suite in rose, it's: 'Do you think you can put up with this blue, Annabel?' But there comes the cameo now. No, the other way, from the street."

Jimmie met the prospector midway across the lobby. "Mr. Banks?" he began genially. "I am the lucky one this time; I came in purposely to see you. I am Daniels, representing the *Seattle Press*. My paper is particular about the Alaska news, and I came straight to headquarters to find out about the Iditarod camp."

Banks kept on to the desk, and Jimmie turned to walk with him. The clerk was ready with his key. "Mrs. Banks hasn't come in yet," he said, smiling.

"She's likely been kept up at Sedgewick-Wilson's. I introduced her to a friend of mine there. I had to chase around to find a contractor that could ship his own scrapers and shovels across the range, and I thought the time would go quicker, for her, picking out clothes. But," he added, turning to the reporter, "we may as well sit down and wait for her here in the lobby."

"I understand," began Daniels, opening his notebook on the arm of his chair, "that your placer in the Iditarod country has panned out a clear one hundred thousand dollars."

"Ninety-five thousand, two hundred and twenty-six," corrected the mining man, "with the last clean-up to hear from."

Jimmie set these figures down, then asked: "Is the rumor true that the Morgansteins are considering an offer from you?"

"No, sir," piped the little man. "They made me an

offer. I gave 'em an option on my bunch of claims for a hundred and fifty thousand. Their engineer has gone in to look the property over. If they buy, they'll likely send a dredger through by spring and work a big bunch of men."

There was a silent moment while Jimmie recorded these facts, then: "And I understand you are interested in fruit lands east of the mountains," he said. "It often happens that way. Men make their pile up there in the frozen north and come back here to Washington to invest it."

"Likely," replied Banks shortly. "Likely. But it's my wife that owns the property in the fruit belt. And it's a mighty promising layout; it's up to me to stay with it till she gets her improvements in. Afterwards — now I want you to get this in correct. Last time things got mixed; the young fellow wrote me down Bangs. And I've read things in the newspaper lately about Hollis Tisdale that I know for a fact ain't so."

"Hollis Tisdale?" Jimmie suspended his pencil. "So you know the Sphynx of the Yukon, do you?"

"That's it. That's the name that blame newspaper called him. Sphynx nothing. Hollis Tisdale is the best known man in Alaska and the best liked. If the Government had had the sense to put him at the head of the Alaska business, there'd been something doing, my, yes."

The reporter finished his period. "Don't let this interview bother you," he said. "It's going into my paper straight, Mr. Banks, and in your own words."

While he spoke, his vigilant glance rested lightly on one of the several guests scattered about the lobby. He was a grave and thoughtful man and had seemed deeply engrossed in a magazine, but he had changed his seat for a chair within speaking distance, and Jimmie had not seen him turn a page.

"What I was going to say, then," resumed Banks, "was that afterwards, when the orchards are in shape, I am going back to Alaska and take a bunch of those abandoned claims, where the miners have quit turning up the earth, and just seed 'em to oats and blue stem. Either would do mighty well. The sun shines hot long summer days, and the ground keeps moist from the melting snow on the mountains. I've seen little patches of grain up there and hay ripening and standing high as my shoulder. But what they need most in the interior is stock farms, horses and beeves, and I am going to take in a fine bunch of both; they'll do fine; winter right along with the caribou and reindeer."

"Well, that's a new idea to me," exclaimed Daniels. "Alaska to me has always stood for blizzards, snow, glaciers, impregnable mountains, bleak and barren plains like the steppes of Russia, and privation, privation of the worst kind."

Banks nodded grimly. "That's because the first of us got caught by winter unprepared. Why, men freeze to death every blizzard right here in the States; sometimes it's in Dakota; sometimes old New York, with railroads lacing back and forth close as shoestrings. And imagine that big, unsettled Alaska interior without a single railroad and only one wagon-road; men most of the time breaking their own trails. Not a town or a house sometimes in hundreds of miles to shelter 'em, if a storm happens to break. But you talk with any Swede miner from up there. He'll tell you they could make a new Sweden out of Alaska. Let us use the timber for building and fuel; let a man that's got the money to do it start a lumber-mill or mine the coal. Give us the same land and mineral laws you have here in the States, and homeseekers would flock in thick as birds in springtime."

The stranger closed his magazine. "Pardon me," he

said, taking advantage of the pause, "but do you mean that Conservation is all that is keeping home-seekers out of Alaska?"

Banks nodded this time with a kind of fierceness; his eyes scintillated a white heat, but he suppressed the imminent explosion and began with forced mildness, "My, yes. But you imagine a man trying to locate with ninety-five per cent. of the country reserved. First you've got to consider the Coast Range. The great wall of China's nothing but a line of ninepins to the Chugach and St. Elias wall. The Almighty builds strong, and he set that wall to hold the Pacific Ocean back. Imagine peaks piled miles high and cemented together with glaciers; the Malispina alone has eighty miles of water front; and there's the Nanatuk, Columbia, Muir; but the Government ain't found names for more'n half of 'em yet, nor a quarter of the mountains. Now imagine a man getting his family over that divide, driving his little bunch of cattle through, packing an outfit to keep 'em going the first year or so. Suppose he's even able to take along a portable house; what's he going to do about fuel? Is he going to trek back hundreds of miles to the seaport, like the Government expects, to pack in coal? Australian maybe, or Japan low grade, but more likely it's Pennsylvania sold on the dock for as high as seventeen dollars a ton. Yes, sir, and with Alaska coal, the best kind and enough to supply the United States for six hundred years, scattered all around, cropping right out of the ground. Think of him camped alongside a whole forest of spruce, where he can't cut a stick."

The little man's voice had reached high pitch; he rose and took a short, swift turn across the floor. The stranger was silent; apparently he was weighing this astonishing information. But Daniels broke the pause.

"The Government ought to hurry those investigations,"

he said. "Foster, the mining engineer, told me never but one coal patent had been allowed in all Alaska, and that's on the coast. He has put thousands into coal land and can't get title or his money back. The company he is interested with has had to stop development, because, pending investigation, no man can mine coal until his patent is secured. It looks like the country is strangled in red tape."

"It is," cried Banks. "And one President's so busy building a railroad for the Filipinos, and rushing supplies to the Panama Canal he goes out of office and clear forgets he's left Alaska temporarily tied up; and the next one has his hands so full fixing the tariff and running down the trusts he can't look the question up. And if he could, Congress is working overtime, appropriating the treasury money home in the States. There's so many Government buildings to put up and harbors and rivers to dredge, it can't even afford to give us a few lights and charts, and ships keep on feeling their way and going to destruction on the Alaska coast. Alaska is side-tracked. She's been left standing so long she's going to rust."

"If some of our senators could listen to you," said the stranger, with a swift and vanishing smile, "their eyes would be opened. But that is the trouble; Alaska has had no voice. It is true each congressman has been so burdened with the wants of his own State that session after session has closed before the Alaska bills were reached. We have been accustomed to look on Alaska as a bleak and forbidding country, with a floating population of adventurers and lawless men, who go there with the intention to stay only long enough to reap a mineral harvest. If she had other great resources and such citizens as you, why were you not in Washington to exploit her?"

Lucky Banks shook his head. "Up to this year," he

said and smiled grimly, "I couldn't have made the trip without beating my way, and I guess if I went to some of those senators now and escaped being put down for an ex-convict, they'd say I was engineering a trust. They'd turn another key on Alaska to keep me out."

He wheeled to tramp down the lobby, then stopped. Annabel had entered. Annabel arrayed in a new, imported tailored suit of excellent cloth, in a shade of Copenhagen blue, and a chic hat of blue beaver trimmed with paradise. Instantly the mining man's indignation cooled. He put aside Alaska's wrongs and hurried, beaming, to meet his wife. "Why, you bought blue," he said with pleased surprise. "And you can wear it, my, yes, about as well as pink."

Annabel smiled with the little ironical curl of the lip that showed plainly her good sense held her steady, on the crest of that high wave whereon it had been fortune's freak to raise her. "Lucile showed me a place, on the next floor of the store, where I could get the tan taken off my face while I was waiting for alterations to my suit. They did it with a sort of cold cream and hot water. There's just a streak left around my neck, and I can cover that with the necklace." She paused then added with a gentle conciliation creeping through her confidential tone: "I am going to wear the pink chiffon to-night to hear Tarquina. Lucile says it's all right for a box party, opening night. I like her real well. I asked her to go with us, and she's coming early, in time for dinner, at seven."

"I thought you'd make a team," replied Banks, delighted. "And I'm glad you asked her, my, yes. It would have been lonesome sitting by ourselves 'mongst the empty chairs."

They were walking towards the elevator, and Daniels, who had learned from the clerk that the important looking

stranger who had seemed so interested in Banks' information, was the head of the new coal commission, going north for investigation, stopped the prospector to say good-by.

"I want to thank you for that interview, Mr. Banks," he said frankly. "I've learned more about Alaska from you in fifteen minutes than I had put together in five years."

"You are welcome, so's you get it in straight. But,"—and the little man drew himself proudly erect,—"I want to make you acquainted with Mrs. Banks, Mr. Daniels."

"I am awfully glad to meet you, Mrs. Banks," said Jimmie cordially, offering his hand. "I understand you are from Hesperides Vale, and I grew up over there in the Columbia desert. It's almost like seeing friends from home."

"Likely," Banks began, but his glance moved from the reporter to his wife and he repeated less certainly, "likely we could get him to take one of those chairs off our hands."

Annabel's humor rose to her eyes. "He's hired a box for Carmen to-night; they were out of seats in the divans, and it worries him because our party is so small."

"I'd be delighted, only,"—Jimmie paused, flushing and looking intently inside his hat—"the fact is, I am going to take the Society Editor on my paper. We have miserable seats, the first row in the orchestra was the best they could do for us, and she has to write up the gowns. She's an awfully nice girl, and she has a little trick of keeping her copy out of sight, so the people in the house never would catch on; would you think me very bold,"—and with this he looked up directly at Annabel—"if I asked you to give that place in your box to her?"

He was graciously assured it would make Mr. Banks "easy" if they both joined the party, and Annabel sug-

gested that he bring the Society Editor to dinner, "so as to get acquainted" before the opera. All of which was speedily arranged by telephone. Miss Atkins accepted with pleasure.

The dinner was a complete success; so complete that the orchestra was concluding the overture when they arrived at the theater. A little flurry ran through the body of the house when Annabel appeared. Mrs. Feversham in the opposite box raised her lorgnette.

"I wonder who they are," she said. "Why, the girl in white looks like Miss Atkins, who writes the society news, and there is your reporter, Daniels."

"Other man is Lucky Banks; stunning woman in pink must be his wife." Frederic, having settled in his chair and eased his lame knee, focussed his own glasses.

"George, Marcia," he exclaimed, "do you see that necklace? Nuggets, straight from the sluices of the Annabel, I bet. Nuggets strung with emeralds, and each as big as they grow. I suppose that chain is what you call barbarous, but I rather like it."

"It is fit for a queen," admitted Marcia. "One of those barbarian queens we read about. No ordinary woman could wear it, but it seems made for her throat." And she added, dropping her lorgnette to turn her calculating glance on her brother's face, "Every woman her price."

Frederic laughed shortly. The purplish flush deepened in his cheeks, and his eyes rested on Beatriz Weatherbee. She was seated in the front of the box with Elizabeth, and as she leaned forward a little, stirred by the passionate cry of the violins, her profile was turned to him.

"The price doesn't cut as much figure as you think," he said.

Then the curtain rose. Tarquina was a marvelous

Carmen. The Society Editor, who had taken her notebook surreptitiously from a silk evening bag and, under cover of a chiffon scarf, commenced to record the names and gowns of important personages, got no farther than the party in the opposite box during the first act. But she made amends in the intermission. It was then a smile suddenly softened her firm mouth, and she introduced Annabel to her columns with this item.

"Noticeable among the out of town guests were Mr. and Mrs. John Henry Banks, who entertained a box party, following a charming dinner at the New Washington. Mrs. Banks, a recent bride, was handsomely gowned in pink chiffon over messaline, and wore a unique necklace of nuggets which were gathered from her husband's mine near Iditarod, Alaska. The gold pieces were linked lengthwise, alternating with single emeralds, and the pendant was formed of three slender nuggets, each terminating in a matched diamond and emerald."

While Geraldine wrote this, Frederic Morganstein made his way laboriously, with the aid of a crutch, around to the box. "How do do, Miss Atkins," he said. "Hello, Daniels! Well, Mr. Banks, how are you? Greatest Carmen ever sung in this theater, isn't it? Now, keep your seat. I find it easier to stand. Just came for a minute to be presented to — your wife."

His venture carried. The little man, rising, said with conscious pride: "Mrs. Banks, allow me to make you acquainted with Mr. Morganstein. He's the man that holds the option on the Annabel. And this is Miss Purdy, Mr. Morganstein; Miss Lucile Purdy of Sedgewick-Wilson's. I see you know the rest of the bunch."

"I guess it's up to me to apologize, Mrs. Banks," said Frederic, heavily humorous. "I wouldn't believe my sister, Mrs. Feversham, when she told me there were some

smart women in those Alaska towns." He paused, laughing, while his glance moved from Annabel's ironical mouth to her superb shoulders and rested on the nugget chain; then he said: "From that interview of yours in to-night's *Press*, Mr. Banks, there isn't much the country can't produce."

"Likely not," responded the little man quickly. "But my wife was an Oregon girl. We were engaged, my, yes, long before I saw Alaska. And lately she's been living around Hesperides Vale. She's got some fine orchard property over there, in her own right."

"Is that so?" Frederic's speculative look returned to Annabel's face. "Hesperides Vale. That's in the new reclamation country, east of the mountains, isn't it? I was intending to motor through that neighborhood when this accident stopped me and put an end to the trip. They are turning out some fine apples in that valley, I understand. But it's curtain time. Awfully glad I've met you; see you again. Lend me your shoulder, will you, Daniels — around to my box?"

While they were crossing the foyer, he said: "That enlargement came out fine; you must run up to my office, while it's there to-morrow, to see it. And that was a great write-up you gave Lucky Banks. It was yours, wasn't it? Thought so. Bought a hundred copies. Mrs. Feversham is going to take 'em east to distribute in Washington. Double blue-pencilled one, 'specially for the President."

Jimmie smiled, blushing. "That's more than I deserve, but I'm afraid, even if it reaches his hands, he won't take the time to read it."

"You leave that to Mrs. Feversham," replied Morganstein. "Saw that little scoop, too, about Tisdale. He's the closest oyster on record."

"The trouble was," said Jimmie wisely, "he started

that Indian story and nobody thought to interrupt with more coal questions."

"You mean he told that yarn purposely to head us off?"

"That's the way it seemed to me afterwards. He spun it out, you know; it lasted to Bremerton, where I got off. But it was interesting; the best I ever heard, and I took it all down, word for word. It was little use, though. The chief gave one look at my bunch of copy and warned me, for the last time, the paper wasn't publishing any novels. What I had gone aboard the *Aquila* for was to write up her equipment and, incidentally, to pick up Hollis Tisdale's views on Alaska coal."

They had reached the entrance to the Morganstein box; the orchestra was playing again, the curtain began to rise on the second act, and Daniels hurried back to his place. But during the next intermission, an usher brought the young reporter a note. It was written concisely on a business card, but Jimmie read it through slowly a second time before he handed it to the Society Editor.

"Mrs. Feversham wants to see that story," so it ran. "Leave it at my office in the morning. She may take it east with her. Knows some magazine people who are going to feature Alaska and the Northwest."

After a thoughtful moment Miss Atkins returned the card to Jimmie. "Is it the Indian story?" she asked.

Daniels nodded, watching her face. His smouldering excitement was ready to flame.

"They will read it for Mrs. Feversham,"—Geraldine's voice trembled slightly—"and they will take it. It's a magazine story. They ought to pay you handsomely. It's the best thing you ever wrote."

Marcia Feversham saw possibilities in that story. Indeed, writing Jimmie from Washington, she called it a lit-

the masterpiece. There was no doubt it would be accepted somewhere, though he must expect to see it cut down considerably, it was so long. Then, presumably to facilitate the placing of the manuscript, she herself went over it with exceeding care, revising with her pencil, eliminating whole paragraphs, and finally fixing the end short of several pages. In the copy which her husband's stenographer prepared, the original was reduced fully a third. After that it mellowed for an interval in Marcia's drawer.

At the close of November, it was announced that Stuart Foster, the junior defendant in the first "Conspiracy to defraud the Government" trial, was weather-bound in Alaska. This, taken in consideration with the serious illness of Tisdale, on whom the prosecution relied for technical testimony, resulted in setting the case for hearing the last week in the following March. It was at this time, while Hollis was lying unconscious and in delirium at a hospital, that his great wealth began to be exploited. Everywhere, when inquiries were made as to his health, fabulous statements followed about the Aurora. To mention the mine was like saying "Open Sesame!" Then, finally, it was whispered and repeated with conviction by people who "wouldn't have believed it of Hollis Tisdale" at the beginning, that he had defrauded the widow of his dead partner — who had made the discovery and paid for it with his life — of her share.

Then, at last, early in December, Jimmie's masterpiece was forwarded to a new magazine in New York.

"*Dear Mr. Sampson; —*" so Marcia wrote —

"Here is a story of Western life that I believe will be of interest to you. The incident actually occurred. The man who killed the Indian child, and who amused my brother's guests with the story while we were cruising lately on the *Aquila*, was Hollis Tisdale of the Geographical Survey. He is probably the best known figure in

Alaska, the owner of the fabulously rich Aurora mine. His partner, who made the discovery, paid for it with his life, and there is a rumor that his wife, who should have a half interest, is penniless.

“Mr. Tisdale will be a leading witness for the Government in the pending Alaska coal cases. Strange — is it not? — since a criminal is barred from testifying in a United States court.

“The last issue of your magazine was most attractive. Enclosed are lists of two thousand names and my check to cover that many sample copies of the number in which the story is published. March would be opportune. Of course, while I do not object to any use you may care to make of this information, I trust I shall be spared publicity.

“Very truly,

“MARCIA FEVERSHAM.”

CHAPTER XXI

FOSTER'S HOUR

FREDERIC MORGANSTEIN did not wait until spring to open his villa. The furnishings were completed, even to the Kodiak and polar-bear rugs, in time to entertain a house-party at Christmas. Marcia, who came home for the event, arrived early enough to take charge of the final preparations, but the ideas that gave character to the lavish decorations were Beatriz Weatherbee's. She it was who suggested the chime of holly bells with tongues of red berries, hung by ropes of cedar from the vaulted roof directly over the stage; and saw the two great scarlet camellias that had been coaxed into full bloom specially for the capitalist placed at either end of the footlights, while potted poinsettias and small madrona trees, brought in from the bluffs above the grounds, finished the scheme with the effect of an old mission garden. Then there were a hundred more poinsettias disposed of, without crowding, on the landings and inside the railing of the gallery, with five hundred red carnations arranged with Oregon grape and fern in Indian baskets to cap the balustrade. To one looking up from the lower hall, they had the appearance of quaint jardinière.

There was not too much color. December, in the Puget Sound country, means the climax of the wet season when under the interminable curtain of the rain, dawn seems to touch hands with twilight. It was hardly four o'clock that Christmas eve when the *Aquila* arrived with the guests from Seattle, but the villa lights were on. A huge and resinous backlog, sending broad tongues of flame into

the cavernous throat of the fireplace, gave to the illumination a ruddier, flickering glow. To Foster, who was the first to reach the veranda, Foster who had been so long accustomed to faring at Alaska road-houses, to making his own camp, on occasion, with a single helper in the frosty solitudes, that view through the French window must have seemed like a scene from the Arabian Nights. Involuntarily he stopped, and suddenly the luxurious interior became a setting for one living figure. Elizabeth was there, arranging trifles on a Christmas tree; and Mrs. Feversham, seated at a piano, was playing a brilliant bolero; but the one woman he saw held the center of the stage. Her sparkling face was framed in a mantilla; a camellia, plucked from one of the flowering shrubs, was tucked in the lace above her ear, and she was dancing with castanets in the old mission garden.

The next moment Frederic passed him and threw open the door with his inevitable "Bravo!" And instantly the music ceased; Marcia started to her feet; the dancer pulled off her mantilla, and the flower dropped from her hair.

"Go on! Encore!" he laughed. "My, but you've got that cachucha down to a science; bred, though, I guess, in your little Spanish feet. You'd dance all the sense a man has out of his head."

"That's the reason none of us heard the *Aquila* whistle," said Marcia, coming forward. "Beatriz promised to dance to-night, in a marvelous yellow brocade that was her great-grandmother's, and we were rehearsing; but she looked so like a nun, masquerading, in that gray crêpe de Chine, I almost forgot the accompaniment. Why, Mr. Foster! How delightful you were able to get home for Christmas."

"I am fortunate," he answered, smiling. "The ice caught me in the Yukon, but I mushed through to Fair-

banks and came on to the coast by stage. I just made the steamer, and she docked alongside the *Aquila* not fifteen minutes before she sailed. Mr. Morganstein brought me along to hear my report."

"I guess we are all glad to have you home for Christmas," said Elizabeth.

She moved on with her sister to meet the other guests who were trooping into the hall, and Foster found himself taking Mrs. Weatherbee's hand. His own shook a little, and suddenly he was unable to say any of the friendly, solicitous things he had found it so easy to express to these other people, after his long absence; only his young eyes, searching her face for any traces of care or anxiety the season may have left, spoke eloquently. Afterwards, when the greetings were over, and the women trailed away to their rooms, he saw he had forgotten to give her a package which he had carried up from the *Aquila*, and hurried to overtake her at the foot of the stairs.

"It was brought down by messenger from Vivian Court for you," he explained, "just as we were casting off, and I took charge of it. There is a letter, you see, which the clerk has tucked under the string."

The package was a florist's carton, wide and deep, with the name Hollywood Gardens printed across the violet cover, but the letter was postmarked Washington, D. C. "Violets!" she exclaimed softly, "'when violet time is gone.'"

Her whole lithe body seemed to emanate a subdued pleasure, and settling the box, unopened, in the curve of her arm, she started up the staircase. Foster, looking up, caught the glance she remembered to send from the gallery railing. Her smile was radiant.

She did not turn on the electric switch when she closed her door; the primrose walls reflected the light from the great plate-glass window, with the effect of candle glow.

She put the box on a table near the casement and laid the letter aside to lift the lid. The perfume of violets rose in her face like liberated incense. The box was filled with them; bunches on bunches. She bent her cheek to feel the cool touch of them; inhaled their fragrance with deep, satisfying breaths. Presently she found the florist's envelope and in it Tisdale's card. And she read, written under the name in a round, plain woman's hand, "This is to wish you a Merry Christmas and let you know I have not forgotten the project."

The sparkle went out of her face. After a moment she picked up the letter and compared the address with the writing on the card. It was the same and, seating herself by the window, she broke the seal. When she had read the first line under the superscription, she stopped to look at the signature. It was Katherine Purdy. She turned back and began again:

"My dear Mrs. Weatherbee:

"I am the night nurse on Mr. Tisdale's ward. He dictated the message on his card to me, and I learned your address through ordering the violets of the Seattle florist for him. It set me wondering whether he has ever let you know how desperate things were with him. He is the most unselfish man I ever saw, and the bravest that ever came on this floor. The evening he arrived the surgeons advised amputating his hand — it was a case of blood-poisoning — but he said, 'No, I am ready to take the risk; that right hand is more than half of me, my better half.' He could joke, even then. And when the infection spread to the arm, it was the same. After that it was too late to operate; just a question of endurance. And he could endure all right. My, but he was patient! I wish you could have seen him, as I did, lying here hour after hour, staring at the ceiling, asking for nothing, when every nerve in his body must have been on fire. But he won through. He is lying here still, weak and pale enough, but safe.

“Maybe I seem impertinent, and I suppose I am young and foolish, but I don't care; I wouldn't be hard as nails, like some in this clinic, if it was to cost me my diploma. I came from the Pacific west — I am going back there as soon as I graduate — and a girl from there never can learn to bottle her feelings till she looks like a graven image. Besides, I know I am writing to a western woman. But I want to say right here he never made a confidant of me, never said one word, intentionally, about you, but there were nights when his temperature was running from a hundred and four degrees that he got to talking some. Most of the time he was going all over that terrible trip to find poor Mr. Weatherbee, and once, when he was hunting birds along some glacier, he kept hearing David singing and calling him. Again he was just having the best, quiet little visit with him. My, how he loved that man! And when it wasn't David, it was you. ‘I know you couldn't marry a man like Morgan,’ he said. ‘You may think so, but you will not when the time comes.’ And once it was, ‘Beatrice, Beatrice, in spite of everything I can't help believing in you.’ Then one night, his worst before the crisis, he seemed to be helping you through some awful danger, it was a storm I think, and there were wild beasts and mountains, and at last when it was all over, he said quietly: ‘You do owe your life to me, but I shall never hold you to the debt; that would be too monstrous.’ And a little later it was, ‘Head high, hold fast, it will be a stiff fight, soldier. My dear, my dear, do you think I don't know how near you came to loving me?’ I guess you know how he said that. There are certain tones in his voice that sink straight to the bottom of your heart; I couldn't keep from crying. And it seems to me that if you really knew how much he thought of you, and how sick he had been, and how he has wanted you, nothing could keep you from packing up and coming straight to Washington. I know I should. I could go anywhere, through Alaska or the Great Sahara, it wouldn't matter which, for a man, if there is one in this world, who could love me that well.”

Beatriz Weatherbee folded the letter and replaced it in the envelope. The action was mechanical, and she sat twisting it with a kind of silent emphasis, looking out into the thick atmosphere. A dash of hail struck the window; the plate glass grew opaque. Then, suddenly, she lifted her arms to the table and dropped her face; her body shook. It was as though she had come at last to her blank wall; the inevitable she had so persistently evaded was upon her; there was no escape.

Presently some one knocked. And instantly her intrepid spirit was up, on guard. She sat erect and pressed her handkerchief swiftly to her eyes. Then Marcia Feversham opened the door and, finding the button, flashed on the lights.

"Why, Beatriz," she exclaimed. "Are you here in the dark? You must have fallen asleep in your chair."

"And dreaming." She rose, shading her eyes from the sudden glare. "But it was a wretched dream, Marcia; I am glad you wakened me. Where is Elizabeth?"

"Making Frederic's cocktail. He needed a bracer to go through a business meeting with Stuart Foster; but she will be here directly. I thought, since we are to share your rooms, we had better dress early to be out of the way. And I sent Celeste in to the Hallidays; Elizabeth can do everything for me."

"Much better than Celeste," she agreed. "And while you are busy, I shall go for a bracing little walk."

"A walk?" echoed Marcia in astonishment. "Why, it's storming. Hear that!"

Another burst of hail struck the window. Mrs. Weatherbee turned, listening, and so avoiding Marcia's penetrating eyes, dropped her hand from her own. "I have my raincoat and cap," she said, "and a smart brush with the wind will clear my head of cobwebs."

With this she hurriedly smoothed the letter and laid it

between the pages of a book; lifting the violets from the table, she carried them out of the steam-heated apartment to the coolness of the sleeping-porch. Mrs. Feversham followed to the inner room and stood watching her through the open door.

"Violets!" she exclaimed. "At Christmas! From wherever did they come?"

"From Hollywood Gardens," she responded almost eagerly. "Isn't it marvelous how they make the out-of-season flowers bloom? But this flurry of hail is the end of the storm, Marcia; the clouds are breaking, and it is light enough to see the path above the pergola. I shall have time to go as far as the observatory."

Before she finished speaking, she was back in the room and hurrying on her raincoat. Mrs. Feversham began to lay out various toilet accessories, but presently, when the gallery door closed behind Beatriz, she walked to the table near the plate-glass window and picked up the book. It was a morocco-bound edition of Omar's *Rubaiyat*, which she had often noticed at the apartment in Vivian Court, yet she studied the title deliberately, and also the frontispiece, before she turned to the pages that enclosed the letter. But it was natural that, holding both her brother's and Beatriz Weatherbee's interests so at heart, her scruples should be finally dispelled, and she laid the volume face down, to keep the place, while she read the night nurse's unclinical report. After that she went to the box of violets in the sleeping-porch and found Tisdale's message, and she had slipped the card carefully back and stood looking meditatively off through the open casement when her sister entered from the gallery. At the same time Mrs. Weatherbee appeared on the path above the pergola. But she had not escaped to the solitude she so evidently had desired, for Foster accompanied her. When they stopped to look down on the villa and the little cove

where the *Aquila* rocked at her moorings, Marcia waved her hand gaily, then turned to the brilliant room.

Elizabeth met her at the threshold. "What has sent Beatriz out in this weather?" she asked.

"Why, you see,"—Marcia answered with a little backward gesture to the figures on the slope,—“since this is Stuart Foster’s first visit to the villa, he must be personally conducted through the park.”

"She tried her best to discourage him. They were standing at the side entrance when I came through the dining-room. She warned him first impressions were everything and that it would be blowing a gale at the observatory; besides, if Frederic was waiting, she would not be responsible."

"But, 'come what will, what may'"—and meeting her sister's look, Marcia's eyes gathered brilliancy—"the man must have his hour."

"That is what he told her. He said the syndicate had had his time and brains, he might as well add his soul, for three months steady, and now he was entitled to his hour. I wonder—" Elizabeth's even voice wavered—"Do you think she will refuse him?"

"I haven't a doubt." And Marcia crossed to the dressing-table and began to remove the shell pins from her glossy black hair.

"She seemed so changed," pursued Elizabeth following. "So, well, anxious, depressed, and you know how gay she was at the time the *Aquila* came. And I happened to be near them when we started up-stairs. It was plain she was glad to see him. But he gave her a package that had been forwarded from Vivian Court. There was a letter; it may have been from Lucky Banks."

Marcia was silent. She lifted her brush and swept it the length of her unbound hair.

"If it was," resumed Elizabeth, "if he has experimented

far enough and wants to forfeit that bonus, I am going to buy that piece of Wenatchee desert myself. The Novelty mills will pay me enough for my tide lands."

"No, Elizabeth. You will hold on to your tide lands, every foot." Mrs. Feversham paused to watch her sister's eyes capitulate under the batteries of her own, then said: "But you need not worry; Frederic will probably take that option off Lucky Banks' hands. Now, please do my puffs; high, you know, so as to use the paradise aigrette."

Foster, too, had felt the change in Mrs. Weatherbee's mood since he left her at the foot of the staircase; the exhilaration that had been so spontaneous then, that had seemed to expand to take him in, was now so manifestly forced. And presently it came over him she was making conversation, saying all these neutral things about the villa and grounds to safeguard the one vital thing she feared to have him touch.

"Tell me about yourself," he interrupted at last. "You don't know how I've worried about you; how I've blamed myself all these slow months for leaving you as I did. Of course you understood the company decided to send me in to the Iditarod suddenly, with only a few hours' notice, and to reach the interior while the summer trails were passable I had to take the steamer sailing that day. I tried to find you, but you were out of town; so I wrote."

"I received the letter," she responded quickly. "I want to thank you for it; it was very pleasant indeed to feel the security of a friend in reserve. But you had written if there was anything you could do, or if, any time, I should need you to let you know, and there was no reason to. I saw I had allowed you to guess the state of my finances; they had been a little depressed, I confess, but soon after you sailed, I gave an option on that desert land

east of the Cascades and was paid a bonus of three thousand dollars."

"Then Tisdale did take that property off your hands, after all. I tried to make myself believe he would; but his offer to buy hinged on the practicability of that irrigation project."

"I know. He found it was practicable to carry it out. But — I gave the option to Mr. Banks."

"Lucky Banks," questioned Foster incredulously, "of Iditarod? Why, he talked of a big farming scheme in Alaska."

"I do not know about that. But he had thought a great deal of David. They had been partners, it seems, in Alaska. Once, in a dreadful blizzard, he almost perished, and David rescued him. He knew about the project and offered to make the payment of three thousand dollars to hold the land until he found out whether the scheme was feasible. I needed the money very much. There was a debt it was imperative to close. So I accepted the bonus without waiting to let Mr. Tisdale know."

Foster's brows clouded. "Well, why shouldn't you? Tisdale has himself to blame, if he let his opportunity go."

There was a silent interval. They had reached the brow of the bluff and, coming into the teeth of the wind, she dipped her head and ran to gain the shelter of the pavilion. Then, while she gathered her breath, leaning a little on the parapet and looking off to the broad sweep of running sea, Foster said: "It was that debt that worried me up there in the wilderness. You had referred to it the evening after the theater, a week before I went away. You called it a debt of honor. You laughed at the time, but you warned me it was the hardest kind of debt because an obligation to a friend kept one continually paying interest in a hundred small ways. You

said it was like selling yourself on a perpetual instalment plan. That wasn't the first time you had spoken of it, but you seemed to feel the pressure more that night and, afterwards, up there in the north, I got to thinking it over. I blamed myself for not finding out the truth. I was afraid the loan was Frederic Morganstein's." He paused and drew back a step with a quick uplift of his aggressive chin. "Was it?" he asked.

"Yes." She drew erect and turned from the parapet to meet his look. "My note came into his hands. But I see I must explain. It began in a yearly subscription to the Orthopedic hospital; the one, you know, for little deformed children. I was very interested when the movement started; I sang at concerts, danced sometimes you remember, to help along the fund. And I endowed a little bed. David always seemed just on the brink of riches in those days, his letters were full of brilliant predictions, but when the second annual payment fell due, I had to borrow of Elizabeth. She suggested it. She herself was interested deeper, financially, than I. All the people we knew, who ever gave to charity, were eager to help the Orthopedic; the ladies at the head were our personal friends; the best surgeons were giving their services and time. I hadn't the courage to have my subscription discontinued so soon, and I expected to cancel the debt when I heard again from David. But the next spring it was the same; I borrowed again from Elizabeth. After that, when she wanted to apply the sum to the hospital building fund, Mrs. Feversham advanced the money, and I gave my note. My bed, then, was given to a little, motherless boy. He had the dearest, most trusting smile and great, dark eyes; the kind that talk to you. And his father had deserted him. That seems incredible; that a man can leave his own child, crippled, ill, unprovided for; but it does happen, sometimes." She paused to steady her voice and

looked off again from the parapet. "The surgeons were greatly interested in the case," she went on. "They were about to perform an unusual operation. All his future depended on it. So — I let my subscription run on; so much could happen in a year. The operation was a perfect success, and when the boy was ready to go, one of the Orthopedic women adopted him. He is the happiest, sturdiest little fellow now.

"At the end of the summer when the note fell due Mrs. Feversham did not care to renew it; she was going to Washington and wished to use the money in New York. The desert tract was all I had, and when Mr. Morganstein planned the motoring trip through the mountains and down to Portland, he offered to take a day to look the land over. He did not want to encumber himself with any more real estate, he said, but would advise me on its possibilities for the market. An accident to the car in Snoqualmie Pass obliged him to give up the excursion, and Marcia disposed of the note to him. She said it could make little difference to me since her brother was willing to let the obligation rest until I was ready to meet it. I do not blame her; there are some things Marcia Feversham and I do not see in the same light. It isn't so much through custom and breeding; it's the way we were created, bone and spirit." Her voice broke but she laid her hand on the parapet again with a controlling grasp and added evenly, "That is the reason when Mr. Banks came I was so ready to accept his offer."

"So, that was your debt of honor!" Foster began unsteadily; the words caught in his throat, and for an instant her face grew indistinct through the mist he could not keep back from his eyes. "You knew you were traveling on thin ice; the break-up was almost on you, yet you handicapped yourself with those foundlings. And you never told me. I could have taken over that subscription,

I should have been glad of the chance, you must have known that, but you allowed me to believe it was a loan to cover personal expenses."

She met the reproach with a little fleeting smile. "There were times when those accounts pressed, I am going to admit that, in justice to Elizabeth. She always buoyed me through. I have known her intimately for years. We were at Mills Seminary together, and even then she was the most dependable, resourceful, generous girl in the school. I never should have had the courage to dispose of things — for money — but she offered to. Once it was the bracelet that had been my great-grand-mother's; the serpent, you remember, with jewelled scales and fascinating ruby eyes. The Japanese consul bought it for his wife. And once it was that dagger the first American Don Silva wore. The design was Moorish, you know, with a crescent in the hilt of unique stones. The collector who wanted it promised to give me the opportunity to redeem it if ever he wished to part with it, and Elizabeth had the agreement written and signed."

"Like a true Morganstein. But I knew how much she thought of you. I used to remind myself, up there in the Iditarod wilderness, that you had her clear, practical sense and executive ability to rely on."

"That has been my one rare good-fortune; to have had Elizabeth. Not that I depreciate my other friends," and she gave Foster another fleeting smile. "There was Mrs. Brown who in the autumn, when I saw the necessity to give up my apartment at Vivian Court, asked me to stay in exchange for piano and dancing lessons. I had often taught her little girls for pleasure, they were so sweet and lovable, when they visited in my rooms. Still, afterwards, I learned the suggestion came from Elizabeth. Now you know everything," she added with determined gaiety. "And I have had my draught of ozone. We

must hurry back, or they will wonder what has become of us."

She turned to the path, and the young engineer followed in silence. He did not know everything; deep in his heart the contradiction burned. Whatever may have caused her exhilaration at the time the *Aquila* arrived, it was not his return, and while her explanations satisfied him that she was in no immediate financial distress, he felt that her confidence covered unplumbed depths she did not wish him to sound.

They had reached the footbridge over the cascade when he said abruptly: "After all, I am glad Lucky Banks got ahead on the irrigation project. He will find it feasible, if any one can. He grew up on an Oregon farm, and what he hasn't learned about sluicing in Alaska isn't worth knowing. It leaves Hollis Tisdale no alternative."

She turned waiting, with inquiry in her eyes.

"I mean in regard to the Aurora. He hasn't the saving grace of an excuse, now, not to convey that last half interest back to you."

"I do not want a half interest in the Aurora mine." She drew herself very straight, swaying a little on the balls of her feet. "You must not suggest it. I should not accept it even through a United States court. It belongs to Mr. Tisdale. He furnished the funds that made my husband's prospecting trip possible. And all the gold in Alaska could not repay him for — what he did. Sometimes, when I think of him alone on that terrible trail, he stands out more than a man. Epics have been written on less; it was a friendship to be glorified in some great painting or bronze. But then he touched so lightly on his own part in the story; in the incense he burned to David he was obscured."

Foster stood watching her in surprise. The color that the wind had failed to whip back to her cheeks burned now,

two brilliant spots; raindrops, or tears, hung trembling on her lashes, and through them flamed the blue fires of her eyes.

"So," he said slowly, "so, Tisdale did hunt you up, after all; and, of course, you had the whole hard story from him."

"I heard him tell it, yes, but he left out about the — wolves."

"Wolves?" repeated Foster incredulously. "There were no wolves. Why, to be overtaken by a pack, single-handed, on the trail, is the worst that can happen to a man."

She nodded. "Mr. Banks told me. He had talked with the miners who found him. It was terrible." A great shudder ran through her body; for a moment she pressed her fingers to her eyes, then she added with difficulty, almost in a whisper: "He was defending David."

"No, no! Great Scott! But see here,"—Foster laid his hand on her arm and drew her on down the path, "don't try to tell me any more. I understand. Banks shouldn't have told you. Come, remember Tisdale won through. He's safe."

After a silence, she said: "I doubt if you know how ill he has been."

"Tisdale? No, I hadn't heard."

"I only learned to-day; and he has been in a Washington hospital all these months. The surgeons advised amputating his hand," she went on with a tremulous breathlessness, "but he refused. He said he would take the risk; that right hand was more than half of him, his 'better half.'"

Involuntarily Foster smiled in recognition of that dominant note in Tisdale. "But he never seemed more physically fit than on the night I left Seattle," he expostulated. "And there isn't a man in Alaska who understands the

dangers and the precautions of frostbite better than Hollis Tisdale does."

"It was not frost; it was a vicious horse," she answered. "It happened after you saw him, on that trip to Wenatchee, while he was leading the vixen over a break in the road. We were obliged to spend the night at a wretched way-house, and the hurt became infected."

Foster stopped. "You were obliged to spend the night?" he inquired.

"Yes. It happened in this way. Mr. Tisdale had taken the Milwaukee line over the mountains, intending to finish the trip on horseback, to see the country, and I, you remember, was motoring through Snoqualmie Pass with the Morgansteins. His train barely missed colliding with our car. Mr. Morganstein was injured, and the others took the westbound home with him, but I decided to board the eastbound and go on by stage to Wenatchee, to see my desert tract, and return by way of the Great Northern. I found the stage service discontinued, so Mr. Tisdale secured a team instead of a saddle-horse, and we drove across."

"I see." Foster smiled again. So Tisdale had capitulated on sight. "I see. You looked the tract over together, yet he hesitated with his offer."

She did not answer directly. They had reached the pergola, and she put out her hand groping, steadying herself through the shadows. "Mr. Tisdale believed at the beginning I was some one else," she said then. "I was so entirely different from his conception of David Weatherbee's wife. In the end he offered to finance the project if I would see it carried through. I refused."

"Of course you refused," responded Foster quickly. "It was preposterous of him to ask it of you. I can't understand it in Tisdale. He was always so broad, so fine, so head and shoulders above other men, so, well,

chivalrous to women. But, meantime, while he hesitated, Banks came with his offer? ”

“ Yes. While he was desperately ill in that hospital. I — I don’t know what he will think of me — when he hears — ” she went on with little, steadying pauses. “ It is difficult to explain. So much happened on that drive to the Wenatchee valley. In the end, during an electrical storm, he saved me from a falling tree. What he asked of me was so very little, the weight of a feather, against all I owe him. Still, a woman does not allow even such a man to finance her affairs; people never would have understood. Besides, how could I have hoped, in a lifetime, to pay the loan? It was the most barren, desolate place; a deep, dry gulf shut in by a wicked mountain — you can’t imagine — and I told him I never could live there, make it my home.” They were nearly through the pergola; involuntarily she stopped and, looking up at Foster, the light from a Japanese lantern illumined her small, troubled face. “ But in spite of everything,” she went on, “ he believes differently. To-day his first message came from Washington to remind me he had not forgotten the project. How can I — when he is so ill — how can I let him know? ”

Foster had had his hour; and, at this final moment, he sounded those hitherto unplumbed depths. “ It will be all right,” he said steadily; “ wait until you see what Lucky Banks does. You can trust him not to stand in Tisdale’s way. And don’t think I underrate Hollis Tisdale. He is a man in a thousand. No one knows that better than I. And that’s why I am going to hold him to his record.”

CHAPTER XXII

“AS MAN TO MAN”

IN January, when Mrs. Feversham returned to Washington, her brother accompanied her as far as Wenatchee. He went prepared to offer Banks as high as five thousand dollars for his option.

At that time the Weatherbee tract was blanketed in snow. It never drifted, because Cerberus shut out the prevailing wind like a mighty door; even the bench and the high ridge beyond lifted above the levels of the vale smooth as upper floors. Previous to that rare precipitation, gangs of men, put to work on both quarter sections, had removed the sage-brush and planted trees, and the new orchard traced a delicate pattern on the white carpet in rows and squares. Banks had hurried the concrete lining of the basin walls, and when it became necessary to suspend construction on the flumes, he saw with satisfaction that the reservoir would husband the melting snows and so supply temporary irrigation in the early spring. All the lumber estimates had been included in his orders for building material in the autumn, and already the house on the bench showed a tiled roof above its mission walls, while down the gap and midway up the side slope of Cerberus rose the shingled gables of Annabel's home.

To facilitate the handling of freight, the railroad company had laid a siding at the nearest point in Hesperides Vale; then, for the convenience of the workmen, the daily local made regular stops, and the little station bore the

name of Weatherbee. Later, at the beginning of the year, it had become a post-office, and the Federal building included a general store. Also, at that time, the girders of a new brick block rose on the adjoining lots, and a sign secured to the basement wall announced: "This strictly modern building will be completed about June first. For office and floor space see Henderson Bailey."

The financier, who had motored up the valley in a rented car, noted these indications of an embryo town with interest.

"Who is Henderson Bailey?" he asked.

And the chauffeur answered with surprise: "Don't you know Bailey? Why, he's the man that got in on the ground floor. He owns the heart of Hesperides Vale. That was his apple orchard we passed, you remember, a few minutes ago. But the man who is backing him on that brick block is Lucky Banks of Alaska. They are pulling together, nip and tuck, for Weatherbee."

"Nip — and Tuck," repeated Morganstein thoughtfully. "That reminds me of a young team of bays I considered buying last fall, over at North Yakima. Rather well named, if you knew 'em. But they were a little too gay for Seattle hills and the lady I expected would drive 'em. George, though, they made a handsome showing. A dealer named Lighter owned 'em, and they won the blue ribbon for three-year-olds at Yakima and Spokane."

"I know them," replied the chauffeur. "They are owned here in the valley now; and Lucky Banks' wife is driving them. You can meet her most any day speeling down to the Columbia to see her goats."

"Goats?" queried Frederic.

"Yes, sir. Didn't you know she used to keep a flock of Angoras up here? It was her land before she was married. But when Banks turned up with his pile and started the orchards, the goats had to go. It wouldn't

have taken them a week to chew up every stick he planted. So she hired a man to winter them down on the Columbia, where she could keep an eye on them. Strange," the chauffeur went on musingly, "what a difference clothes make in a woman. Nobody noticed her much, only we thought she was kind of touched, when she was herding those billies by herself up that pocket, but the minute Banks came, she blossomed out; made us all sit up and take notice. Yes, sir, she's sure some style. To see her in her up-to-date motoring-coat, veil to match, cape gloves, and up behind that team, you'd think the Empress of India had the road."

"Just what I said first time I saw her," Morganstein chuckled thickly. "Or I guess it was the Queen of Sheba I called her. Happened to be grand-opera night, and she wore a necklace made of some of Banks' nuggets. George, she could carry 'em; had the throat and shoulders. It isn't the clothes that make the difference, my boy; it's the trick of wearing 'em. I know a slim little thoroughbred, who puts on a plain gray silk like it was cloth of gold. You'd think she was walking tiptoe to keep it off this darned old earth. Lord, I'd like to see her in the real stuff. George, I'll do it, soon's we're married," and he laughed deeply at the notion. "I'll order a cloth of gold gown direct from Paris, and I'll set a diamond tiara on her proud little head. Bet it don't out-sparkle her eyes. Lord, Lord, she'll make 'em all stare."

The chauffeur gave the financier a measuring glance from the corner of his eye, but he puckered his lips discreetly to cover a grin, and with his head still cocked sideways, looked off to the lifting front of Cerberus, whistling softly *Queen Among the Heather*. But the tune ceased abruptly and, straightening like an unstrung bow, he swerved the machine out of the thoroughfare and brought it to a stop.

It was not the Empress of India who held the road, but little Banks in his red car. Slackening speed, he shouted back above the noise of the exhaust: "Hello! Is that you, Mr. Morganstein? I guess likely you're looking for me. But I can't stop. I've got to catch the local for Wenatchee; the eastbound don't make our station, and I'm booked for a little run through to Washington, D. C."

"That so?" answered Morganstein thoughtfully. "I came over just to look at this orchard of yours. See here, wait a minute." He unbuttoned his heavy coat and, finding a pocket, drew out a time-card. "You will have a couple of hours to waste in Wenatchee between trains. Give me half an hour, long enough to show me a bird's-eye view of the project—that's all I want in this snow and I guarantee to put you in Wenatchee on time for your eastbound. The road is in good shape; driver knows his car."

Banks left his roadster and came over to the larger car. "I'll risk it since you've broke trail," he said, taking the vacant seat behind. "But I knew if I took chances with snow, in this contrary buzz-wagon of mine, she'd likely skid off the first mean curve."

Morganstein, laughing, changed his seat for the one beside the prospector. "It's like this, dry and firm as a floor, straight through to Wenatchee. These are great roads you have in this valley; wish we had 'em on the other side the range."

"I sent a scraper up from the station ahead of me," said Banks. "And, driver, we may as well run up the switchback to the house. It's level there, with room to turn. And it will give you the chance to see the whole layout below," he went on, explaining to Morganstein. "The property on this side the mountain belongs to my wife, but we ain't living here yet; we are stopping with

folks down by the station. Likely we'll move, soon's I get back from my trip. That is, if the boys get busy. Seem's if I have to keep after some of them all the time. To-day it's the lathers. I've got to stop, going through Weatherbee, to tell my wife to have an eye on them. They get paid by the bundle, and they told me this morning lathe would run short before they was through. I knew I had ordered an extra hundred on the architect's figgers, but I didn't say anything. Just prospected 'round and came back unexpected, and caught one of them red-handed. He was tucking a bunch between the ceiling and the upper floor, without even cutting the string. I made them rip off the lathe, and there they were stored thick, a full bundle to 'bout every three they'd nailed on."

"That's the way," commented Morganstein, "every man of 'em will do you, if he sees a chance. Mrs. Banks will have to keep both eyes open, if you are leaving it to her. But it will be compensation to her, I guess, driving those bays over from the station every day. Hand-somest team in Washington. I'll bet," and he turned his narrow eyes suddenly on Banks, "Lighter held you up for all they were worth."

"The team belongs to Hollis Tisdale," answered Banks. "He bought them at Kittitas last fall and drove them through. They were in the valley when I came, and he asked me to look after them while he was east. My wife exercises them. She understands horses, my, yes. One of those colts had a mean trick of snapping at you if you touched the bit, but she cured him complete. And she took such a shine to that team I thought likely they'd do for a Christmas present. Tisdale told me in the fall if I had a good chance, to sell, so I wrote and made him an offer. But his answer never came till last night. A nurse at the hospital in Washington wrote for him; he had been laid up with a case of blood-poison all win-

ter, and it started from a nip that blame' colt gave him on the trip from Kittitas. He refused my price because, seeing's the team wasn't safe for a full-sized man to drive, it went against his conscience to let them go to a lady.”

“He was right,” said Morganstein. “George, that was a lucky escape. I was within an ace of buying that team myself. But I put down Tisdale's sickness to frost-bite; often goes that way with a man in the north.”

“Sure; it does.” Banks paused, while his glance fell to the empty fingers of his right glove. “But that colt, Nip, gets the credit this time. It happened while Hollis was trying to lead him over a break in the road. He said it didn't amount to anything, the night I saw him before he left Seattle, but he had the hand bandaged, and I'd ought to have known it was giving him trouble.”

Morganstein pondered a silent moment, then said slowly, “Kittitas is close enough to be a suburb of Ellensburg, and that's where the Wenatchee stage meets the Milwaukee Puget Sound train. Friend of mine made the trip about that time; didn't say anything of a break in the road.”

“There's just one road through,” answered Banks, “and that's the one they used for hauling from the Northern Pacific line while this railroad was building. Likely there was a stage then, but it ain't running now.”

Frederic pondered again, then a gleam of intelligence flashed in his eyes. “Did Tisdale make that trip from Kittitas alone?” he asked.

Banks shook his head. “He didn't mention any passengers. Likely it was having to drive himself, after his hand was hurt, that did the mischief. Anyhow, he's had a close call; fought it out sooner than let the doctors take his hand; and he never let one of us boys know. That was just the way with Dave Weatherbee; they was a team. But I'm going to look him up, now, soon's I can. He had

to get that nurse to write for him. Likely there ain't a man around to tend to his business; he might be all out of money."

"I guess, with the Aurora mine to back him, you needn't worry."

The little man shook his head. "It will take more security than the Aurora to open a bank account in Washington, D. C. I ain't saying anything against Dave Weatherbee's strike," he added quickly, "but, when you talk Alaska to those fellows off there in the east, they get cold feet."

Morganstein looked off, chuckling his appreciation. They had arrived at the final curve; on one side, rising from the narrow shoulder, stood Annabel's new home, while on the other the mountain sloped abruptly to Weatherbee's vale. Banks pointed out the peach orchard on the bench at the top of the pocket; the rim of masonry, pushing through the snow, that marked the reservoir; the apple tract below.

"I see," said Frederic, "and this mountain we are on must be the one Mrs. Weatherbee noticed, looking down from that bench. Reminded her of some kind of a beast!"

Banks nodded. "It looked like a cross between a cougar and a husky in the fall. One place you catch sight of two heads. But she'll be tamer in the spring, when things begin to grow. There's more peaches, set in narrow terraces where the road cross-cuts down there, and all these small hummocks under the snow are grapes. It's warm on this south slope and sheltered from the frosts; the vines took right ahoid; and, with fillers of strawberries hurrying on the green, Dave's wife won't know the mountain by summer, my, no."

"Presume," said the financier abruptly, "you expect to supply both tracts with water from those springs?"

"My, no. This quarter section belongs to my wife,

and it's up to me to make the water connections safe for her. I can do it." Banks set his lips grimly, and his voice shrilled a higher key. "Yes, sir, even if I have to tunnel through from the Wenatchee. But I think likely I'll tap the new High Line and rig a flume with one of these new-style electric pumps. And my idea would be to hollow out a nice little reservoir, with maybe a fountain, right here on this shoulder alongside the house, and let a sluice and spillways follow the road down. There'd be water handy then, and to spare, in case Dave's springs happen to pinch out."

Morganstein's glance moved slowly over the sections of road cross-cutting the mountain below, and on up the vale to the distant bench. Presently he said: "What are you building over there? A barn, or is it a winery for your grapes?"

"It's neither," answered Banks with sharp emphasis. "It's a regular, first-class house. Dave Weatherbee was counting on striking it rich in Alaska when he drew the plans. The architect calls it California-Spanish style. The rooms are built around a court, and we are piping for the fountain now."

Frederic grew thoughtful. Clearly an offer of five thousand dollars for Lucky Banks' option on the Weatherbee tract was inadequate. After a moment he said: "What is it going to cost you?"

"Well, sir, counting that house complete, without the furniture, seven thousand would be cheap."

After that the financier was silent. He looked at his watch, as they motored down Cerberus, considering, perhaps, the probabilities of a telegram reaching Marcia: but he did not make the venture when they arrived in Wenatchee, and the nearest approach he made to that offer was while he and Banks were waiting at the station for their separate trains. They were seated together on a bench

at the time, and Frederic, having lighted a cigar, drew deeply as though he hoped to gather inspiration. Then he edged closer and, dropping his heavy hand on the little prospector's shoulder, said thickly: "See here, tell me this, as man to man, if you found both those tracts too big to handle, what would you take for your option on the Weatherbee property?"

And Banks, edging away to the end of the seat, answered sharply: "I can handle both; my option ain't for sale."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DAY OF PUBLICATION

IT was a mild evening, the last in February, and Jimmie, who had received two copies of the March issue of *Sampson's Magazine* direct from the publisher, celebrated the event by taking the Society Editor canoeing on Lake Washington. Instead of helping with the bow paddle, of which she was fully capable, Miss Atkins settled against the pillows facing him, with the masterpiece in her lap. The magazine was closed, showing his name among the specially mentioned on the cover, but she kept the place with her finger. She had a pretty hand, and it was adorned by the very best diamond that could be bought at Hanson's for one hundred and fifty dollars.

She waited, watching Jimmie's stroke, while the Peterboro slipped out from the boathouse and rose quartering to the swells of a passing launch. Her hat was placed carefully behind her in the bow, and the light wind roughened her hair, which was parted on the side, into small rings on her forehead. It gave her an air of boyish camaraderie, and the young author's glance, moving from the magazine and the ring, swept her whole trim figure to the mannish, flat-heeled little shoes, and returned to her face. "This is my red-letter day," he said.

"It's the proudest in my life," answered Geraldine, and the way in which she said it made him catch his breath.

"It makes me feel almost sure enough to cut loose from the *Press* and go into business for myself."

"Oh, I shouldn't be in a hurry to leave the paper, if

"I were you," she replied, "even though *Sampson's* has asked to see more of your work."

"It isn't the magazine opening I am considering; though I shall do what I can in that way, of course. But what would you think of an offer to take full charge of a newspaper east of the Cascades? It's so." He paused, nodding in emphasis to the confirmation. "The letter is there in my coat pocket. It's from Bailey — you remember that young fellow I told you about who made an investment in the Wenatchee valley. Well, it seems they have incorporated a town on some of that property. His city lots are selling so fast he has raised the price three times. And they have put him up for mayor. He says it's mighty hard to run an election without a newspaper, and even if it's a late start, we will be ready next time. And the valley needs advertising; people in the east don't know where Wenatchee apples grow. You understand. He will finance a newspaper — or rather he and Lucky Banks are going to — if I will take the management. He is holding offices now, in a brick block that is building, until he hears from me."

"Is it in *Hesperides Vale*, where the Bankses live?"

"Yes. The name of the town is Weatherbee. And I heard from that little miner, too." Jimmie paused, smiling at the recollection. "It was a kind of supplement to Bailey's letter. He thought likely I could recommend some young fellow to start a newspaper. A married man was preferred, as it was a new camp and in need of more ladies."

Geraldine laughed, flushing softly. "Isn't that just like him?" she said. "I can see his eyes twinkling."

"It sounds rather good to me," Jimmie went on earnestly. "I have confidence in Bailey. And it was mother's dream, you know, to see me establish a paper over there; it would mean something to me to see it real-

ized — but — do you think you could give up your career to help me through? ”

Geraldine was silent, and Jimmie leaned forward a little, resting on his stroke. “I know I am not worth it, but so far as that goes, neither was my father; yet mother gave up everything to back him. She kept him on that desert homestead the first five years, until he proved up and got his patent, and he might have stayed with it, been rich to-day, if she had lived.”

“Of course I like you awfully well,” said Geraldine, flushing pinkly, “and it isn’t that I haven’t every confidence in you, but — I must take a little time to decide.”

A steamer passed, and Jimmie resumed his strokes, mechanically turning the canoe out of the trough. Geraldine opened the magazine and began to scan the editor’s note under the title. “Why,” she exclaimed tremulously, “did you know about this? Did you see the proofs?”

“No. What is the excitement? Isn’t it straight?”

“Listen!” Miss Atkins sat erect; the cushion dropped under her elbow; her lips closed firmly between the sentences she read.

““This is one of those true stories stranger than fiction. This man, who wantonly murdered a child in his path and told of it for the amusement of a party of pleasure-seekers aboard a yacht on Puget Sound, who should be serving a prison sentence to-day, yet never came to a trial, is Hollis Tisdale of the Geographical Survey; a man in high favor with the administration and the sole owner of the fabulously rich Aurora mine in Alaska. The widow of his partner who made the discovery and paid for it with his life is penniless. Strange as it may seem — for the testimony of a criminal is not allowable in a United States court — Hollis Tisdale has been called as a witness for the Government in the pending Alaska coal trials!”

The Society Editor met Jimmie's appalled gaze. "It sounds muckraky," she commented, still tremulously. "But these new magazines have to do something to get a hold. This is just to attract public attention."

"They'll get that, when Tisdale brings a suit for libel. Hope he will do it, and that the judgment will swamp them. They must have got his name from Mrs. Feversham."

"It looks political," said Geraldine conciliatingly, "as though they were striking through him at the administration."

"Go on," said Jimmie recklessly. "Let's have it over with."

And Geraldine launched quickly into the story. It had been mercilessly and skilfully abridged. All those undercurrents of feeling, which Jimmie had faithfully noted, had been suppressed; and of David Weatherbee, whom Tisdale had made the hero of the adventure, there was not a word.

"Great guns!" exclaimed the unfortunate author at the finish. "Great — guns!"

But Geraldine said nothing. She only closed the magazine and pushed it under the pillow out of sight. There was a long silence. A first star appeared and threw a wavering trail on the lake. Jimmie, dipping his paddle mechanically, turned the Peterboro into this pale pathway. The pride and elation had gone out of his face. His mouth drooped disconsolately.

"And you called this your proudest day," he broke out at last.

An unexpected gentleness crept over the Society Editor's countenance. "It would be great to help create a city," she said then. "To start with it ourselves, at the foundations and grow." And she added very softly, with a little break in her voice: "I've decided to resign and go to Weatherbee."

CHAPTER XXIV

SNOWBOUND IN THE ROCKIES AND "FIT AS A MOOSE"

TISDALE, who was expected to furnish important testimony in the Alaska coal cases, had been served official notice at the hospital during Banks' visit. The trial was set for the twenty-fourth of March and in Seattle.

The prospector had found him braced up in bed, and going over the final proof of his Matanuska report, with the aid of a secretary. "You better go slow, Hollis," he said. "You are looking about as reliable as your shadow. Likely the first puff of a wind would lift you out of sight. My, yes. But I just ran over to say hello, and let you know if it's the expense that's hurrying you, there's a couple of thousand in the Wenatchee bank I can't find any use for, now the water-works are done and the house. You can have it well's not. It ain't drawing any interest." And Tisdale had taken the little man's hand between both his own and called him "true gold." But he was in no pressing need of money, though it was possible he might delay in refunding those sums Banks had advanced on the project. He was able enough to be on his feet, but these doctors were cautious; it might be another month before he would be doing a man's work.

He started west, allowing himself ample time to reach Seattle by the fifteenth of March, when Banks' option expired, but the fourteenth found him, after three days of delay by floods, snowbound in the Rockies. The morning of the fifteenth, while the rotaries were still clearing track

ahead, he made his way back a few miles to the nearest telegraph station and got into communication with the mining man.

"How are you?" came the response from Weatherbee. "Done for? Drop off at Scenic Hot Springs, if your train comes through. She wrote she was there. Came up with a little crowd for the coasting. Take care of yourself, and here is to you.

"Lucky."

And Tisdale, with the genial wrinkles deepening at the corners of his eyes once more, wired: "Fit as a moose. Go fifteenth. Close business."

A judge may pronounce a sentence yet, at the same time, feel ungovernable springs of sympathy welling from the depths of his heart, and while Tisdale pushed his way back to the stalled train, he went over the situation from Beatriz Weatherbee's side. He knew what the sale of that desert tract must mean to her; how high her hopes had flown since the payment of the bonus. Looking forward to that final interview when, notwithstanding his improvements, Banks should relinquish his option, he weighed her disappointment. In imagination he saw the light go out of her eyes; her lip, that short upper lip with its curves of a bow, would quiver a little, and the delicate nostril; then, instantly, before she had spoken a word, her indomitable pride would be up like a lifted whip, to sting her into self-control. Oh, she had the courage; she would brave it out. Still, still, he had intended to be there, not only to press the ultimate purpose, but to — ease her through. Banks might be abrupt. He was sorry. He was so sorry that though he had tramped, rushed a mile, he faced about, and, in the teeth of a bitter wind, returned to the station.

The snow was falling thickly; it blurred his tracks behind him; the crest of a drift was caught up and carried, swirling, into the railroad cut he had left, and a great gust tore into the office with him. The solitary operator hurried to close the door and, shivering, stooped to put a huge stick of wood in the stove. "It's too bad," he said. "Forgot the main point, I suppose. If this keeps up, and your train moves to-morrow, it will be through a regular snow canyon. I just got word your head rotary is out of commission, but another is coming up from the east with a gang of shovellers. They'll stop here for water. It's a chance for you to ride back to your train."

"Thank you, I will wait," Tisdale answered genially. "But I like walking in this mountain air. I like it so well that if the blockade doesn't lift by to-morrow, I am going to mush through and pick up a special to the coast."

While he spoke, he brushed the snow from his shoulders and took off his hat and gloves. He stood another moment, rubbing and pinching his numb hands, then went over to the desk and filled a telegraph blank. He laid down the exact amount of the charges in silver, to which he added five dollars in gold.

The operator went around the counter and picked up the money. For an instant his glance, moving from the message, rested on Tisdale's face in curious surprise. This man surely enjoyed the mountain air. He had tramped back in the teeth of a growing blizzard to send an order for violets to Hollywood Gardens, Seattle. The flowers were to be expressed to a lady at Scenic Hot Springs.

After that Tisdale spent an interval moving restlessly about the room. He read the advertisements on the walls, studied the map of the Great Northern route, and when the stove grew red-hot, threw open the door and tramped

the platform in the piping wind. Finally, when the keyboard was quiet, the operator brought him a magazine. The station did not keep a news-stand, but a conductor on the westbound had left this for him to read. There was a mighty good yarn—this was it—"The Tenas Papoose." It was just the kind when a man was trying to kill time.

Tisdale took the periodical. No, he had not seen it aboard the train; there were so many of these new magazines, it was hard to choose. He smiled at first, that editor's note was so preposterous, so plainly sensational; or was it malicious? He re-read it, knitting his brows. Who was this writer Daniels? His mind ran back to that day aboard the *Aquila*. Aside from the Morgansteins and Mrs. Weatherbee, there had been no one else in the party until the lieutenant was picked up at Bremerton, after the adventure was told. But Daniels—he glanced back to be sure of the author's name—James Daniels. Now he remembered. That was the irrepressible young fellow who had secured the photographs in Snoqualmie Pass at the time of the accident to the Morganstein automobile; who had later interviewed Mrs. Weatherbee on the train. Had he then sought her at her hotel, ostensibly to present her with a copy of the newspaper in which those illustrations were published, and so ingratiated himself far enough in her favor to gather another story from her?

Tisdale went over to a chair near the window and began to go over those abridged columns. He turned the page, and his lips set grimly. At last he closed the magazine and looked off through the drifting snow. He had been grossly misrepresented, and the reason was clear. This editor, struggling to establish a new periodical, had used Daniels' material to attract the public eye. He may even have had political ambitions and aimed deeper to strike the administration through him. He may have

taken this method to curry favor with certain moneyed men. Still, still, what object had there been in leaving Weatherbee completely out of the story? Weatherbee, who should have carried the leading rôle; who, lifting the adventure high above the sensational, had made it something fine.

Again his thoughts ran back to that cruise on the *Aquila*. He saw that group on the after-deck; Rainier lifting southward like a phantom mountain over the opal sea; and westward the Olympics, looming clear-cut, vivid as a scene in the tropics; the purplish blue of the nearer height sharply defined against the higher amethyst slope that marked the gorge of the Dosewallups. This setting had brought the tragedy to his mind, and to evade the questions Morganstein pressed, he had commenced to relate the adventure. But afterwards he had found himself going into the more intimate detail with a hope of reviving some spark of appreciation of David in the heart of his wife. And he had believed that he had. Still, who else, in all that little company, could have had any motive in leaving out Weatherbee? Why had she told the story at all? She was a woman of great self-control, but also she had depths of pride. Had she, in the high tide of her anger or pique, taken this means to retaliate for the disappointment he had caused her?

The approaching work-train whistled the station. He rose and went back to the operator's desk and filled another blank. This time he addressed a prominent attorney, and his close friend, in Washington, D. C. And the message ran:

"See *Sampson's Magazine*, March, page 320. Find whether revised or Daniels' copy."

Toward noon the following day the express began to crawl cautiously out, with the rotaries still bucking ahead,

through the great snow canyons. The morning of the sixteenth he had left Spokane with the great levels of the Columbia desert stretching before him. And that afternoon at Wenatchee, with the white gates of the Cascades a few hours off, a messenger called his name down the aisle. The answer had come from his attorney. The story was straight copy; published as received.

CHAPTER XXV

THE IDES OF MARCH

IN order to prepare for the defense, Miles Feversham, accompanied by his wife, arrived in Seattle the first week in March. The month had opened stormy, with heavy rains, and to bridge the interval preceding the trial, Marcia planned an outing at Scenic Hot Springs where, at the higher altitude, the precipitation had taken the form of snow, and the hotel advertised good skeeing and tobogganing. "Make the most of it," she admonished Frederic; "it's your last opportunity. If Lucky Banks forfeits his bonus, and you can manage to keep your head and use a little diplomacy, we may have the engagement announced before the case comes up."

Though diplomacy was possible only through suggestion, Frederic was a willing and confident medium. He knew Mrs. Weatherbee had notified Banks she was at Scenic and, watching her that day of the fifteenth, he was at first puzzled and then encouraged that, as the hours passed and the prospector failed to come, her spirits steadily rose.

Elizabeth betrayed more anxiety. At evening she stood at the window in Beatriz's room, watching the bold front of the mountain which the Great Northern tracks cross-cut to Cascade tunnel, when the Spokane local rounded the highest curve and dropped cautiously to the first snowsheds. The bluffs between were too sheer to accumulate snow, and against the dark background the vague outlines

of the cars passed like shadows; the electric lights, blazing from the coaches, produced the effect of an aerial, fiery dragon. Then, in the interval it disappeared, an eastbound challenged from the lower gorge, and the monster rushed from cover, shrieking defiance; the pawing clomp of its trucks roused the mountainside. "There is your last westbound," she said. "If your option man isn't aboard, he forfeits his bonus. But you will be ahead the three thousand dollars and whatever improvements he may have made."

Mrs. Weatherbee stood at the mirror fastening a great bunch of violets at her belt. There was a bouquet of them on the dresser, and a huge bowl filled with them and relieved by a single red rose stood on the table in the center of the room. "That is what troubles me," she replied, and ruffled her brows. "It seems so unjust that he should lose so much; that I should accept everything without compensating him."

Elizabeth smiled. "I guess he meant to get what he could out of the investment, but afterwards, when he married and found his wife owned the adjoining unclaimed tract, it altered the situation. It called for double capital and, if he hesitated and it came to a choice, naturally her interests would swing the balance."

"No doubt," admitted Beatriz. "And in that case," — she turned from the mirror to watch the train — "I might deed her a strip of ground where it was discovered her tract overlapped David's. That would be a beginning."

"See here." Elizabeth turned, and for an instant the motherhood deep in her softened the masculine lines of her face. "Don't you worry about Lucky Banks. Perhaps he did go into the project to satisfy his conscience, but the deal was his, and he had the money to throw away. Some men get their fun making over the earth. When one

place is finished, they lose interest and go looking for a chance to put their time and dollars into improving somewhere else. Besides,"—and she took this other woman into her abrupt and rare embrace—"I happen to know he had an offer for his option and refused a good price. Now, come, Marcia and Frederic have gone down to the dining-room, you know. They were to order for us."

But Beatriz was in no hurry. "The train is on the bridge," she said and caught a quick breath. "Do you hear? It is stopping at the station."

Elizabeth, waiting at the open door, answered: "We can see the new arrivals, if there are any, when we go through the lobby."

Mrs. Weatherbee started across the room, but at the table she stopped to bend over the bowl of violets, inhaling their fragrance. "Aren't they lovely and — prodigal enough to color whole fields?"

Elizabeth laughed. "Frederic must have ordered wholesale, or else he forgot they were in season."

Beatriz lifted her face. "Did Mr. Morganstein send these violets?" she asked. "I thought — but there was no card."

"Why, I don't know," said Elizabeth, "but who else would have ordered whole fields of them?"

Mrs. Weatherbee was silent, but she smiled a little as she followed Elizabeth from the room. When they reached the foot of the staircase, the lobby was nearly deserted; if the train had left any guests, they had been shown already to their rooms.

The Morganstein table was at the farther end of the dining-room, but Frederic, who was watching the door when the young women entered, at once noticed the violets at Mrs. Weatherbee's belt.

"Must have been sent from Seattle on that last east-bound," he commented, frowning. "Say, Marcia, why

didn't you remind me to order some flowers from town?"

Marcia's calculating eyes followed his gaze. "You would not have remembered she is fond of violets, and they seem specially made for her; you would have ordered unusual orchids or imported azaleas."

Frederic laughed uneasily, and a purplish flush deepened in his cheeks. "I always figure the best is never too good for her. Not that the highest priced makes so much difference with her. Look at her, now, will you? Wouldn't you think, the way she carries herself, that little gray gown was a coronation robe? George, but she is game! Acts like she expects Lucky Banks to drop in with a clear fifty thousand, when the chances are he's gone back on his ten. Well," he said, rising as she approached, to draw out her chair, "what do you think about your customer now? Too bad. I bet you've spent his Alaska dust in anticipation a hundred times over. Don't deny it," he held up his heavy hand in playful warning as he resumed his chair. "Speculated some myself on what you'd do with it. George, I'd like to see the reins in your hands for once, and watch you go. You'd set us a pace; break all records."

"Oh, no, no," she expostulated in evident distress. "I shouldn't care to — set the pace — if I were to come into a kingdom; please don't think that. I have wanted to keep up, I admit; to hold my own. I have been miserably afraid sometimes of being left behind, alone, crowded out, beaten."

"Beaten? You? I guess not. Bet anybody ten to one you'll be in at the finish, I don't care who's in the field, even if you drop in your traces next minute. And I bet if this sale does fall through to-night, you'll be looking up, high as ever, to-morrow, setting your heart on something else out of reach."

"Out of reach?" she responded evenly, arching her

brows. "You surprise me. You have led me to believe I am easy to please."

"So you are," he capitulated instantly, "in most ways. All the same, you carry the ambitions of a duchess buttoned under that gray gown. But I like you for it; like you so well I'm going to catch myself taking that property off your hands, if Banks goes back on you."

He leaned towards her as he said this, smiling and trying to hold her glance, but she turned her face and looked off obliviously across the room. There were moments when even Frederic Morganstein was conscious of the indefinable barrier beyond which lay intrenched, an untried and repelling force. He straightened and, following her gaze, saw Lucky Banks enter the door.

Involuntarily Elizabeth started, and Mrs. Feversham caught a quick breath. "At the eleventh hour," she said then, and her eyes met her brother's. "Yes or no?" they telegraphed.

It was the popular hour, an orchestra was playing, and the tables were well filled, but the mining man, marshalled by a tall and important head waitress, drew himself straight and with soldierly precision came down the room as far as the Morganstein group. There, recognizing Mrs. Weatherbee, he stopped and, with the maimed hand behind him, made his short, swift bow. "I guess likely you gave me up," he said in his high key, "but I waited long's I dared for the through train. She's been snowed under three days in the Rockies. They had her due at Wenatchee by two-fifteen; then it was put off to five, and when the local came along, I thought I might as well take her."

Mrs. Weatherbee, who had started to rise, settled back in her chair with a smile. "I had given you up, Mr. Banks," she said not quite steadily.

Then Morganstein said: "How do, Banks," and offered his hand. "Just in time to join us. Ordered saddle of

Yakima lamb, first on the market, dressing of fine herbs, for the crowd. Suits you, doesn't it?"

To which the little prospector responded: "My, yes, first class, but I don't want to put you out."

"You won't," Frederic chuckled; "couldn't do it if you tried."

But it was Elizabeth who rose to make room for the extra chair on her side of the table, and who inquired presently after his wife.

"Mrs. Banks is fine," he answered, his bleak face glowing. "My, yes, seems like she makes a better showing now than she did at the Corners seven years back."

"Still driving those bays?" asked Frederic.

The mining man nodded with reluctance. "It's no use to try to get her to let 'em alone long's they are on the place, and I couldn't sneak 'em away; she was always watching around. She thinks Tisdale will likely sell when he sees she can manage the team."

"So," laughed Morganstein, "you'll have to come up with that Christmas present, after all."

"They will do for her birthday," replied Banks gravely. "I picked out a new ring for Christmas. It was a first-class diamond, and she liked it all right. She said," and a shade of humor warmed his face, "she would have to patronize the new manicure store down to Wenatchee, if I expected her to have hands fit to wear it, and if she had to live up to that ring, it would cost me something before she was through."

"And did she try the parlors?" asked Elizabeth seriously.

"My, yes, and it was worth the money. Her hands made a mighty fine showing the first trip, and before she used up her ticket, I was telling her she'd have to wear mittens when she played the old melodion, or likely her fingers would get hurt hitting the keys."

Banks laughed his high, strained laugh, and Morganstein echoed it deeply. "Ought to have an establishment in the new town," he said.

"We are going to," the prospector replied; "as soon as the new brick block is ready to open up. There's going to be manicure and hair-dressing parlors back of the millinery store. Lucile, Miss Lucile Purdy of Sedgewick-Wilson's, is coming over to run 'em both. She can do it, my, yes."

"Now I can believe you have a self-respecting and wide-awake town," commented Mrs. Feversham. "But is the big department store backing Miss Purdy?"

"No, ma'am. We ain't talking about it much, but Mrs. Banks has put up money; she says she is the silent partner of the concern."

"Is that so?" questioned Morganstein thoughtfully. "Seems to me you are banking rather heavy on the new town."

Banks' eyes gleamed appreciation, but the capitalist missed his inadvertent pun. After a moment, the mining man said: "I guess the millinery investment won't break us; but there's no question about Weatherbee's being a live town, and Lucile can sell goods."

"I presume next," said Mrs. Feversham with veiled irony, "we shall be hearing of you as the first mayor of Weatherbee."

Banks shook his head gravely. "They shouldered that on to Henderson Bailey."

"I remember," said Frederic. "Man who started the orchard excitement, wasn't he? Got in on the ground floor and platted some of his land in city lots. Naturally, he's running for mayor."

"He's it," responded the mining man. "The election came off Tuesday, and he led his ticket, my, yes, clear out of sight."

"Bet you ran for something, though," responded Morganstein. "Bet they had you up for treasurer."

Banks laughed. "There was some talk of it — my wife said they were looking for somebody that could make good if the city money fell short — but most of the bunch thought my lay was the Board of Control. You see, I got to looking after things to help Bailey out, while he was busy moving his apples or maybe his city lots. My, it got so's when Mrs. Banks couldn't find me down to the city park, watching the men grub out sage-brush for the new trees, she could count on my being up-stream to the water-works, or hiking out to the lighting-plant. It's kept me rushed, all right. It takes time to start a first-class town. It has to be done straight from bedrock. But now that Annabel's house up Hesperides Vale is built, and the flumes are in, she thinks likely she can run her ranch, and I think likely," — the prospector paused, and his eyes, with their gleam of blue glacier ice, sought Mrs. Weatherbee's. Hers clouded a little, and she leaned slightly towards him, waiting with hushed breath — "I think likely," he repeated in a higher key, "seeing's the Alameda has to be finished up, and the fountain got in shape at the park, with the statue about due from New York, I may as well drop Dave's project and call the deal off."

There was a silence, during which the eyes of every one rested on Beatriz. She straightened with a great sigh; the color rushed coral-pink to her face.

"I am — sorry — about your loss, Mr. Banks," she said, then, and her voice fluctuated softly, "but I shall do my best — I shall make it a point of honor — to sometime reimburse you." Her glance fell to the violets at her belt; she singled one from the rest and, inhaling its perfume, held it lightly to her lips.

"You thoroughbred!" said Frederic thickly.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE EVERLASTING DOOR

SOMETIME during the night of the fifteenth, the belated Chinook wind began to flute through the canyon, and towards dawn the guests at Scenic Hot Springs were wakened by the near thunder of an avalanche. After a while, word was brought that the Great Northern track was buried under forty feet of snow and rock and fallen trees for a distance of nearly a mile. Later a rotary steamed around the high curve on the mountain and stopped, like a toy engine on an upper shelf, while the Spokane local, upon which Banks had expected to return to Weatherbee, forged a few miles beyond the hotel to leave a hundred laborers from Seattle. Thin wreaths of vapor commenced to rise and, gathering volume with incredible swiftness, blotted out the plow and the snow-sheds, and meeting, broke in a storm of hail. The cloud lifted, but in a short interval was followed by another that burst in a deluge of rain, and while the slope was still obscured, a report was telegraphed from the summit that a second avalanche had closed the east portal of Cascade tunnel, through which the Oriental Limited had just passed. At nightfall, when the work of clearing away the first mass of debris was not yet completed, a third slide swept down seven laborers and demolished a snow-shed. The unfortunate train that had been delayed so long in the Rockies was indefinitely stalled.

The situation was unprecedented. Never before in the history of the Great Northern had there been so heavy a

snowfall in the Cascades; the sudden thaw following an ordinary precipitation must have looked serious, but the moving of this vast accumulation became appalling. All through that day, the second night the cannonading of avalanches continued, distant and near. At last came an interlude. The warm wind died out; at evening there was a promise of frost; and only the voice of the river disturbed the gorge. Dawn broke still and crisp and clear. The mountain tops shone in splendor, purple cliffs stood sharply defined against snow-covered slopes, and whole companies in the lower ranks of the trees had thrown off their white cloaks. It was a day to delight the soul, to rouse the heart, invite to deeds of emulation. Even Fred-eric was responsive, and when after breakfast Marcia broached a plan to scale the peak that loomed southeast of the pass, he grasped at the diversion. "We're pretty high up already, here at Scenic," he commented, surveying the dome from his chair on the hotel veranda. "Three or four thousand feet ought to put us on the summit. Have the chance, anyhow, to see that stalled train."

"Of course it wouldn't be an achievement like the ascent of Rainier," she tempered, "but we should have chances enough to use our alpenstocks before we're through; and it should be a magnificent view; all the great peaks from Oregon to British Columbia rising around."

"With the Columbia River below us," said Elizabeth, "and all those miles of desert. We might even catch a glimpse of your new Eden over there, Beatriz."

Mrs. Weatherbee nodded, with the sparkles breaking in her eyes. "I know this is the peak we watched the day I drove from Wenatchee. It rose white and shining at the top of Hesperides Vale, and it may have another name, but I called it the Everlasting Door."

Once since their arrival at Scenic Hot Springs they had followed, skeeing, an old abandoned railroad track, used

by the Great Northern during the construction of the big tunnel, to the edge of the desired peak, and, at Marcia's suggestion, Frederic invited Lucky Banks to join the expedition in the capacity of captain and guide. The prospector admitted he felt "the need of a little exercise" and, having studied the mountain with field-glasses and consulted with the hotel proprietor, he consented to see them through. No doubt the opportunity to learn the situation of the Oriental Limited and the possibilities of getting in touch with Tisdale, should the train fail to move before his return from the summit, had influenced the little man's decision. A few spikes in his shoes, some hard-tack and cheese with an emergency flask in his pockets, a coil of rope and a small hatchet that might serve equally well as an ice-ax or to clear undergrowth on the lower slopes, was ample equipment, and he was off to reconnoiter the mountainside fully an hour in advance of the packer whom Morganstein engaged for the first stage of the journey.

When the man arrived at the foot of the sharp ascent where he was to be relieved, Banks was finishing the piece of trail he had blazed and mushed diagonally up the slope to a rocky cleaver that stretched like a causeway from the timber to firm snow, but he returned with time to spare between the departure of the packer and the appearance of his party, to open the unwieldy load; from this he discarded two bottles of claret and another of port, with their wrappings of straw, a steamer-rug, some tins of *pâté de foie gras* and other sundries that made for weight, but which the capitalist had considered essential to the comfort and success of the expedition. There still remained a well-stocked hamper, including thermos bottles of coffee and tea, and a second rug, which he rolled snugly in the oilskin cover and secured with shoulder-straps. The eliminated articles, that he cached under a log, were

not missed until luncheon, which was served on a high spur below the summit while Banks was absent making a last reconnaissance, and Frederic blamed the packer.

The spur was flanked above by a craggy buttress and broke below to an abyss which was divided by a narrow, tongue-like ridge, and over this, on a lower level of the opposite peak, appeared the steep roofs of the mountain station at the entrance to Cascade tunnel, where, on the tracks outside the portal, stood the stalled train. It seemed within speaking distance in that rare atmosphere, though several miles intervened.

After a while sounds of metal striking ice came from a point around the buttress; Banks was cutting steps. Then, following a silence, he appeared. But, on coming into the sunny westward exposure, he stopped, and with two fingers raised like a weather-vane, stood gazing down the canyon. His eyes began to scintillate like chippings of blue glacier.

Involuntarily every one turned in that direction, and Frederic reached to take his field-glasses from the shelf of the buttress they had converted into a table. But he saw nothing new to hold the attention except three or four gauzy streamers of smoke or vapor that floated in the lower gorge.

"Looks like a train starting up," he commented, "but the Limited gets the right of way as soon as there's a clear track."

Banks dropped his hand and moved a few steps to take the glasses from Morganstein. "You're right," he replied in his high, strained key. "It ain't any train moving; it's the Chinook waking up." He focussed on the Oriental Limited, then slowly swept the peak that overtopped the cars. "Likely they dasn't back her into the tunnel," he said. "The bore is long enough to take in the whole bunch, but if a slide toppled off that shoulder,

it would pen 'em in and cut off the air. It looks better outside, my, yes."

"Here is your coffee, Mr. Banks," said Elizabeth, who had filled a cup from the thermos bottle, "and please take anything else you wish while I repack the basket. We are all waiting, you see, to go on."

The prospector paused to take the cup, then said: "I guess likely we won't make the summit this trip. We've got to hustle to get down before it turns soft."

"Oh, but we must make the summit," exclaimed Marcia, taking up her alpenstock. "Why, we are all but there."

"How does it look ahead?" inquired Frederic, walking along the buttress. "Heard you chopping ice."

"I was cutting steps across the tail end of a little glacier. It's a gliddery place, but the going looks all right once you get past. Well, likely you can make it," he added shrilly, "but you've got to be quick."

The life of the trail that sharpens a man's percepts teaches him to read individuality swiftly, and this Alaskan who, the first day out on a long stampede, could have told the dominant trait of each husky in his team, knew his party as well as the risk. Golf and tennis, added to a naturally strong physique, had given the two sisters nerves of steel. Marcia, who had visited some of the great glaciers in the north, possessed the insight and coolness of a mountain explorer; and all the third woman lacked in physical endurance was more than made up in courage. The man, though enervated by over-indulgence, had the brute force, the animal instinct of self-preservation, to carry him through. So presently, when the buttress was passed, and the prospector uncoiled his rope, it was to Mrs. Feversham he gave the other end, placing Morganstein next, with Elizabeth at the center and Mrs. Weatherbee second. Once, twice, Banks felt her stumble, a sink-

ing weight on the line, but in the instant he caught a twist in the slack and fixed his heels in the crust to turn, she had, in each case, recovered and come steadily on. It was only when the gliddery passage was made, the peril behind, that she sank down in momentary collapse.

Banks stopped to unfold his pocket-cup and take out his flask. "You look about done for," he said briskly. "My, yes, that little taste of glacier was your limit. But you ain't the kind to back out. No, ma'am, all you need is a little bracer to put you on your feet again, good as new."

"I never can go back," she said, and met his concerned look with wide and luminous eyes. "Unless — I'm carried. Never in the world."

Morganstein forced a laugh. It had a frosty sound; his lips were blue. "Excuse me," he responded. "Anywhere else I wouldn't hesitate, but here, I draw the line."

The prospector was holding the draught to her lips, and she took a swallow and pushed away the cup. It was brandy, raw, scalding, and it brought the color back to her face. "Thank you," she said, and forced a smile. "It is bracing; my tensions are all screwed. I feel like climbing on to — Mars."

Frederic laughed again. "You go on, Banks," he said, relieving him of the cup; "she's all right. You hurry ahead before one of those girls walks over a precipice."

He could not persuade her to take more of the liquor, so he himself drank the bracer, after which he put the cup and the flask, which Banks had left, away in his own pockets. She was up, whipping down her fear. "Come," she said, "we must hurry to overtake them."

Her steps, unsteady at first, grew sure and determined; she drew longer, deeper breaths; the pink of a wild rose flushed her cheeks. But Frederic, plodding abreast, laid his hand on her arm.

"See here," he said, "you can't keep this up; stop a minute. They've got to wait for us. George, that ambition of yours can spur you to the pace. Never saw so much spirit done up in a small package. Go off, sometime, like Fourth o' July fireworks." He chuckled, looking down at her with admiration in his round eyes. "Like you for it, though. George, it's just that has made you worth waiting for."

She gave him a quick glance and, setting her alpenstock, sprang from his detaining hand.

"See, they have reached the summit," she called. "They are waiting already for us. And see!" she exclaimed tensely, as he struggled after her. "It is going to be grand."

A vast company of peaks began to lift, tier on tier like an amphitheater, above the rim of the dome, while far eastward, as they cross-cut the rounding incline, stretched those tawny mountains that had the appearance of strange and watchful beasts, guarding the levels of the desert, bare of snow. Glimpses there were of the blue Columbia, the racy Wenatchee, but Weatherbee's pocket was closed. Then, presently, as they gained the summit, it was no longer an amphitheater into which they looked, but a billowing sea of cloud, out of which rose steep and inhospitable shores. Then, everywhere, far and away, shone opal-shaded islands of mystery.

"Oh," she said, with a little, sighing breath, "these are the Isles of the Blest. We have come through the Everlasting Door into the better country."

She stood looking off in rapture, but the man saw only the changing lights in her face. He turned a little, taking in the charm of pose, the lift of chin, parted lips, hand shading softly shining eyes. After a moment he answered: "Wish we had. Wish every other man you knew was left out, on the other side of the door."

Her hand fell, she gave him her sweeping look and moved to join the waiting group.

Banks came to meet them. "We've stayed to the limit; my, yes, it's the last call," he explained in his tense key. "There's a couple of places we don't want to see ourselves caught in when the thaw strikes. And they're getting a heavy rain down at the Springs now; likely up at the tunnel it's snow or hail." He paused, turning to send a final glance into the mist, then said: "Less than ten minutes ago I had a sight of that train, but you see now she's wiped off the map. It'll be a close race, my, yes. Give me that stick, ma'am; you can make better time on the down-grade holding on to me."

With this, he offered his able hand to Mrs. Weatherbee and, followed by the rest of the party, helped her swiftly down the slope. But clearly his mind was on the stalled train. "Likely, hugging the mountainside, they don't see how the snow crowds overhead," he said. "And I'd ought to have taken time to run over and give 'em a tip. I'm going to, I'm going to, soon's I get you down to that old railroad track where you can make it alone."

"Do you mean the Limited is in danger?" she asked, springing and tripping to his stride.

And Banks nodded grimly. "Yes, ma'am. It's a hard proposition, even to a man like Tisdale, who is used to breaking his own trail. He knows he's got to fight shy of the slides along that burned over switchback, but if he saw the box that train is in, he would just hike around to this side of the canyon, where the pitches are shorter, and the green trees stand some show to hold the snow, and work down to the old track to the Springs."

"Is Mr. Tisdale"—her voice broke a little—"Mr. Hollis Tisdale on that train?"

"Likely, yes. He was snowbound on her in the Rockies, last I heard, and 'feeling fit as a moose.' Being

penned up so long, he'd likely rather take a hike down to the hotel than not. It would be good for his health." And the little man piped his high, mirthless laugh.

She stumbled, and he felt the hand in his tremble, but the abrupt incline of the glacier had opened before them, and he believed she dreaded to re-cross the ice. "Keep cool," he admonished, releasing her to uncoil the rope again, "Stand steady. Just recollect if you came over this, you can get back."

But when, presently, the difficult passage safely made, they rounded the crag and gained the level shoulder where they had lunched, they seemed to have arrived at a different place. The lower canyon, which not two hours before had stretched into blue distance below them, was lost in the creeping sea of cloud; the abyss at their feet gathered immensity, and the top of the timbered ridge lifted midway like a strange, floating garden. The station at Cascade tunnel, all the opposite mountain, was obscured, then, while Banks stood re-coiling his rope, the sounds that had disturbed the guests at Scenic Hot Springs those previous nights rose, reverberating, through the hidden gorge. The Chinook had resumed its work.

The way below the spur broke in easy steps to the long and gradual slope that terminated above the cleaver of rock and, anxious to reach the unfortunate train, Banks hurried on. Marcia and Elizabeth trailed quickly after, but Mrs. Weatherbee remained seated on the shelving ledge at the foot of the crag. Frederic sank heavily into the place beside her and took out the flask.

"You are all in," he said. "Come, take this; it's diluted this time with snow."

But she gave him no attention, except to push aside the cup. She waited, listening, leaning forward a little as though her wide eyes could penetrate the pall. Then,

torn by cross currents of wind, the cloud parted, and the mountain loomed like a phantom peak over the gulf. She started up and stood swaying gently on her feet while the trees, tall and spectral and cloaked in snow, opened rank on rank like a uniformed company. Lower still, the steep roofs of the station reflected a shaft of the sun, and the long line of cars appeared clearly defined, waiting still on the tracks outside the portal.

The rent in the cloud closed. She turned with a great, sighing breath. "Did you see?" she said. "The train is safe."

"Of course." And again, having himself taken the bracer, Frederic rose and returned the flask to his pocket. "So, that was troubling you; thought that train might have been struck. Guess if an avalanche had come down there, we'd have heard some noise. It's safe enough here," he added. "Top of this crag was built to shed snow like a church steeple."

"But why are we waiting?" And glancing around, she exclaimed in dismay: "The others have gone. See! They are almost out of sight."

She began to walk swiftly to the lower rim of the shoulder, and Frederic followed. Down the slope his sisters and Banks seemed to be moving through a film. They mingled with it indistinctly as the figures in faded tapestry. But Morganstein laid his hand on her arm to detain her. "What's your hurry?" he asked thickly. "All we got to do now is keep their trail. Tracks are clear as day."

"We shall delay them; they will wait."

She tried to pass him, but they had reached the step from the spur, and he swung around to block the narrow way. "Not yet," he said. "This is the moment I've been waiting for. First time in months you've given me a fair chance to speak to you. Always headed me off.

I'm tired of being held at arm's length. I've been patient to the limit. I'm going to know now, to-day, before we go down from this mountain, how soon you are going to marry me."

She tried again to pass him but, taking incautious footing, slipped, and his arm saved her. "I don't care how soon it is," he went on, "or where. Quietly at your apartments, or a big church wedding. On board the first boat sailing for Yokohama, after those coal cases are settled, suits me."

She struggled to free herself, then managed to turn and face him, with her palms braced against his breast. His arm relaxed a little, so that he was able to look down in her lifted face. What he saw there was not altogether anger, though aversion was in her eyes; not surprise, not wholly derision, though her lips suggested a smile, but an indefinable something that baffled, mastered him. His arm fell. "Japan is fine in the spring," he said. "And we could take our time, coming back by way of Hawaii to see the big volcano, with another stop-over at Manila. Get home to begin housekeeping at the villa in mid-summer."

"Oh," she exclaimed at last, "do you think I am a silly girl to be dazzled and tempted? Who knows nothing of marriage and the cost?"

"No," he responded quickly. "I think you are a mighty clever woman. But you've got to the point where you can't hedge any more. Banks has gone back on that option. If he won't buy, nobody else will. And it takes ready money to run a big ranch like that, even after the improvements are in. You can't realize on your orchards, even in the Wenatchee country, short of four years. So you'll have to marry me; only way out."

She gave him her swift, sweeping look, and the blue lights blazed in her eyes. "I will remember you are

Elizabeth's brother," she said. "I will try to remember that. But please don't say any more. Every moment counts; come."

Morganstein laughed. As long as she parried, as long as she did not refuse outright to marry him, he must keep reasonably cool. He stooped to pick up the alpenstock she had dropped, then offered his hand down the step from the spur. "Sorry I put it just that way," he said. "I'm a plain business man; used to coming straight to the point; but I guess you've known how much I thought of you all these years. Had to keep on a high check-rein while Weatherbee lived, and tried my best, afterwards, to give him a year's grace, but you knew just the same. Know — don't you? — I might take my pick out of the dozen nicest girls in Seattle to-day. Only have to say the word. Not one in the bunch would turn me down. But I wouldn't have one of 'em for second choice. Nobody but you will do." He paused, then added with his narrow look: "And what I want, you ought to know that too, I get."

She met the look with a shake of the head and forced a smile. "Some things are not to be bought at any price. But, of course, I have seen — a woman does —" she went on hurriedly, withdrawing her hand. "There was a time, I confess, when I did consider — your way out. But I dared not take it; even then, I dared not."

"You dared not?" Frederic laughed again. "Never thought you were afraid of me. Never saw you afraid of anything. But I see. Miserable experience with Weatherbee made you little cautious. George, don't see how any man could have deserted you. Trust me to make it up to you. Marry me, and I'll show you such a good time Weatherbee won't amount to a bad dream."

"I do not wish to forget David Weatherbee," she said.

"George!" he exclaimed curiously. "Do you mean

you ever really loved him? A man who left you, practically without a cent, before you were married a month."

"No." Her voice was low; her lip trembled a little. "No, I did not love him — as he deserved; as I was able to love." She paused, then went on with decision: "But he did not leave me unprovided for. David Weatherbee never deserted me. And, even though he had, though he had been the kind of man I believed him to be, it would make no difference. I could not marry you."

There was a silence during which they continued to follow the tracks that cross-cut the slope. But Morganstein's face was not pleasant to see. All the complacency of the egotist who has long and successfully shaped lives to his own ends was withdrawn; it left exposed the ugly inner side of the man. The trail was becoming soft; the damp of the Chinook began to envelop them; already the advancing film stretched like a curtain over the sun, and the three figures that had seemed parts of a shaken tapestry disappeared. Then, presently, Banks' voice, muffled like a voice under a blanket, rose through the pall. And Frederic stopped to put his hand to his mouth. "All right! Coming!" he answered, but the shout rebounded as though it had struck a sounding board.

After another plodding silence, the prospector's hail reached them again. It seemed farther off, and this time Morganstein did not respond. He stopped, however, and the woman beside him waited in expectation. "Suppose," he said slowly, "we are lost on this mountain to-night. Make a difference to-morrow — wouldn't it? — whether you would marry me or not."

The color rushed to her face and went; her breast rose and fell in deep, quick breaths, but she met his look fearlessly, lifting herself with the swaying movement from the balls of her feet that made her suddenly taller. "No." And her tone, the way in which she said it, must have stung

even his small soul; then she added: "You are more brutal than I thought."

She turned after that and herself sent the belated response to Banks. But though she repeated the call twice, making a trumpet of her hands and with all the power of her voice, his hail did not reach them again. She started swiftly down. It was beginning to snow.

Frederic had nothing more to say. He moved on with her. It was as though each tried to out-travel the other, still they could not make up that delay. The snow fell in big, soft flakes that blurred the tracks they followed; soon they were completely blotted out, and though he strained his eyes continually, watching for the cleaver of rock they had climbed that morning, the landmark never appeared. Finally, at the same instant, they both stopped, listening. On the silence broke innumerable small sounds like many little hurrying feet. The mountain trembled slightly. "God Almighty!" he cried thickly. Then came the closer rush of a considerable body, not unlike sheep passing in a fog, and panic seized him. "We've got to keep on top," he shouted and, grasping her arm, he swung her around and began to run back up the slope.

In the face of this common peril, personality called a truce, and she pushed on with him blindly, leaving it to him to choose the way and set the pace. But their own tracks down the incline had filled with incredible swiftness; soon they were completely effaced. And, when the noise subsided, he stopped and looked about him, bewildered. He saw nothing but a breadth of sharply dipping slope, white, smooth as an unwritten scroll, over which hung the swaying, voluminous veil of the falling snow. He put his hands to his mouth then, and lifted his voice in a great hail. It brought no reply, but in the moment he waited, somewhere far below in those obscured depths, a

great tree, splitting under tremendous pressure, crashed down, then quickly the terrific sweep and roar of a second mightier avalanche filled the hidden gorge.

Morganstein caught her arm once more. "We must get back to that shoulder where it's safe," he shouted. "Banks will come to look us up." After that, as they struggled on up the slope, he fell to saying over and over, as long as the reverberations lasted: "Almighty God!"

As they ascended, the snow fell less heavily and finally ceased. It became firm underfoot, and a cross wind, starting in puffs, struck their faces sharply with a promise of frost. Then strange hummocks began to rise. They were upheavals of ice, shrouded in snow. Sometimes a higher one presented a sheer front shading to bluish-green. They had not passed this point with Banks, but Morganstein shaped a course to a black pinnacle, lifting through the mist beyond, that he believed was the crag at the shoulder. She stumbled repeatedly on the rough surface. Her labored breathing in the great stillness, like the beat of a pendulum in an empty house, tried his strained nerves. He upbraided her for leaving her alpenstock down the slope. But she paid no attention. She looked back constantly; she was like a woman being led away from a locked door, moving reluctantly, listening against hope for a word or sign. So, at last, they came to the rock. It was not the crag, but a hanging promontory, where the mountain broke in a three-sided precipice. The cloud surged around it like an unplumbed sea.

They crept back, and Morganstein tried again to determine their position. They were too high, he concluded; they must work down a little to round the cliffs, so they took a course diagonally into the smother. Then he, too, began to lose alertness; he walked mechanically, tak-

ing the line of least resistance; his head sagged forward; he saw nothing but the hummocks before him. These grew larger; they changed to narrow ridges with fissures between. After a while, one of these breaks roused him. It was exceedingly deep; he could not see either end of it. The only way was to leap, and he did it clumsily. Then, with his alpenstock fixed, and his spiked heels set in the crust, he reached a hand to her. She was barely able to spring to the lower side, but it did not terrify her. One fear only possessed her. Her glance, seeking, returned to the hidden canyon. But soon they were confronted by a wider and still deeper chasm. It was impossible to cross it, though it seemed to narrow upwards in the direction of the summit. He took her arm and began to ascend, looking for a way over. The pitch grew steadily sharper. They entered the thinning edge of the cloud, and it became transparent like tissue of gold. Suddenly it parted, and Frederic stopped, blinded by the blaze of a red sunset on snow. He closed his eyes an instant, while, to avoid the glare, he turned his face. His first glance shocked him into a sense of great peril. The two fissures ran parallel, and they were ascending a tongue of ice between. Not far below, it narrowed to a point where the two crevasses, uniting, yawned in one. His knees weakened, but he managed to swing himself cautiously around. The causeway seemed to rock under his weight; then, shading his sight with his hand, he saw they were almost beneath the shoulder he had tried to reach. They had climbed too high, as he had believed, but also they had descended too far. And they had come directly down the glacier, to cross the upper end of which Banks had found it necessary to use a lifeline.

"Be careful!" he whispered thickly, and laid his hand on her shoulder, impelling her on. "Be careful, but, for God's sake, hurry!"

He crowded her faster and faster up the incline; he dared not move abreast, it was so narrow. Sometimes he lifted her bodily, for with every step his panic grew. Beads of moisture gathered on his face, though the wind stiffened and sharpened; his own breath out-labored hers, and he cried again over and over: "God Almighty!" and "Almighty God!" Sometimes his tone was blasphemy and sometimes prayer.

But the moment came when she could not be farther pressed. Her shoulder trembled under his hold, her limbs gave, and she sank down, to her knees at first, then to her elbow. Even then she moved her head enough to look backward over the abyss. "The train," she whispered and, shuddering, dropped her face on her relaxed arm.

Morganstein ventured to glance back. Ragged fragments torn from the cloud below rose swirling across the opposite mountain top, and between their edges, like a picture in a frame, appeared briefly the roofs of the little station. But where the Oriental Limited had stood, the avalanche had passed. "God Almighty!" he repeated impotently, then immediately the sense of this appalling catastrophe whet the edge of his personal terror. "Come!" he cried; "come, you can't stop here. It's dangerous. Come, you'll freeze — or worse."

She was silent. She made no effort to rise or indeed to move. He began to press by her and on in the direction of that safe spur. But presently another dread assailed him; the dread of the city-bred man — accustomed to human intercourse, the swing of business, the stir of social life, to face great solitudes alone. This cross-fear became so strong it turned him back in a second panic. Then floundering to keep his equilibrium after an incautious step, he sat down heavily and found himself skidding towards the larger crevasse. He lifted his

alpenstock and in a frenzy thrust it into the ice between his knees. It caught fast just short of the brink and held him astride, with heels dangling over the abyss. He worked away cautiously, laboriously, shaking in all his big, soft bulk; and would have given up further attempt to rescue Beatriz Weatherbee had he not at this moment discovered himself at her side.

He had not yet tried to rise to his feet, so safe-guarding himself with the alpenstock thrust once more in the ice, he paused to take the flask from his pocket and poured all that remained of the liquor into the cup. It was a little over half full. Possibly he remembered how lavish he had been with those previous draughts, for he looked at his companion with a kind of regret as he lifted the cup unsteadily to drink. Then, gathering the remnants of his courage, he put his arm under her head, raising it while he forced the small surplus of brandy he had left between her lips. She revived enough under the scalding swallow to push the cup away. Anywhere else he would have laughed at her feeble effort to throw off his touch; but he did not urge her to finish the draught, and, as he had done earlier that day, himself hastily drained the cup. He dropped it beside the empty flask and struggled up.

"Now," he said, "we've got to make that spur where it's safe. Come. It isn't far; just been up to that place where Banks helped us across; had to come back for you."

But he was obliged to lift her to her feet and to support her up the slope. And this, even though the tongue widened above them, threw him perilously close to the crevasse. Once, twice, the ice broke on the brink and dropped clinking down, down. It was impossible to make the leap again to the higher surface they had descended; unhampered, he must have been physically unfit. Behind them the cloud closed over the Pass and the moun-

tain top under which the Oriental Limited had stood. His companion no longer looked back; she moved as mechanically though less certainly than one who walks in sleep. The fears that possessed him, that she herself had held so finely in check when they had followed Banks on this glacier, did not trouble her now. Her indifference to their extremity began to play on Frederic's unhinged nerves. This white, blue-lipped woman was not the Beatriz Weatherbee he had known; who had climbed the slope with him that morning, all exhilaration, spirit, charm; whose example had challenged his endurance and held his courage to the sticking point.

"Why don't you say something?" he complained. "Have you turned into ice? Now look where you step, can't you? Deuced fix you got us into, dreaming there in the clouds, when Lucky Banks had left the spur. Come on, you bloodless ghost; come, or I'll let you stay where you drop. Nice place to spend the night in. Almighty God!"

So, upbraiding her when she stumbled, blaming her for their plight, threatening to leave her if she should fall, and flaying himself on with renewed panic, he brought her to the top of the double crevasse and the prospector's crossing. But here, with the levels of the spur before them, her strength reached low ebb. This time he was not able to rouse her, and he threw down his alpenstock and took her in his arms, and went slipping and recovering the remaining steps. He stopped, winded, and stood her on her feet, but her body sagged limply against him, and the sight of her still face terrified him. He carried her a little farther, to the shelter of the crag, and laid her there. Then he dropped to his knees beside her, and grasping her shoulders shook her, at first slowly, then swiftly, with the roughness of despair.

"Wake up," he cried thickly. "Wake up! Don't

you see we're out of that hole? Come, Banks will be here any minute. Come, wake up."

She made no response. The sun had set; it was growing bitterly cold, and there was little protection under the crag. It was a place where cross winds met. Torn fragments from the sea of cloud below drove against the pinnacle. It was like a lofty headland breasting rolling surf. Frederic stood erect and sent his voice down through the smother in a great shout. It brought no answer, and he settled helplessly on the shelf beside her. It began to hail furiously, and he dropped his face, shielding it in his arms.

The storm passed and, rousing himself, he searched his pockets vainly for a match to light his remaining cigar. Later he went through them again, hoping to find a piece of chocolate—he had carried some that morning—but this, too, was without result. He fell to cursing the packer, for appropriating the port and tinned things that were missing at lunch-time. But after that he did not talk any more and, in a little while, he stretched himself beside the unconscious figure at the foot of the crag. A second cloud lifted in a flurry of snow. Every hidden canyon sent out innumerable currents of air, and gales, meeting, lifted the powdery crust in swirls, wrapping them in a white sheet. Finally, from far off, mingling with the skirling pipes of the wind came a different, human sound. And, presently, when the call—if call it was—was repeated, the man sat up and looked dully around. But he made no effort to reply. He waited, listening stupidly, and the cry did not reach him again. Then, his glance falling to the woman, a ray of intelligence leaped in his eyes. He rose on his knees and moved her so there was room for his own bulk between her body and the rock. He had then, when he stretched himself on the snow, a windbreak.

The wind rushed screaming into the vast spaces beyond the mountain top, and returning, met the opposing forces from the canyon and instantly became a whirlwind. It cut like myriads of teeth; it struck two-edged with the swish, slash of a sword; and it lifted the advancing cloud in a mighty swirl, bellied it as though it had been a gigantic sail, and shook from its folds a deluge of hail-stones followed by snow. Through it all a grotesque shape that seemed sometimes a huge, abnormal beetle and sometimes a beast, worked slowly around the crag, now crawling, now rearing upright with a futile flapping of stiff wings, towards the two human figures. It was Lucky Banks, come to rescue them.

A heavier blast threw him on his face, but he rose to his knees and, creeping close, squared his shoulders to protect the slighter body. At the same time the significance of the position of Morganstein's unconscious bulk struck him. "You rat!" he cried with smothered fury. "You damn rat!"

Then he caught up a handful of snow with which he began to rub the woman's face. Afterwards he removed her gloves to manipulate her cold hands. He worked swiftly, with the deftness of practice, but the results were slow, and presently he took the rug from the pack he carried and covered her while he felt in Frederic's pockets for the flask he had neglected to return. "Likely there wasn't a drop left when she came to need it, you brute. And I'd like to leave you here to take your chances. You can thank your luck I've got to use you."

Banks keyed his voice high, between breaths, to out-scale the wind, but he did not wait for a reply. Before he finished speaking, he had opened his big, keen-bladed clasp-knife and commenced to cut broad strips from the rug. He passed some of these, not without effort, under

Morganstein's body, trussing the arms. Then, wrapping the smaller figure snugly in the blanket, he lifted it on to the human toboggan he had made and bound it securely. Finally he converted the shoulder-straps of his pack into a sort of steering gear, to which he fastened his life-line.

These preparations had been quickly made. It was not yet dark when he worked this sled over the rim of the spur and began to descend the long slope. The violence of the wind was broken there, so that he was able to travel erect, drawing his load. After a while, when the flurry of snow had passed, a crust formed on the surface, and in steeper pitches he was obliged to let the toboggan forge ahead, using himself as a drag. With the change to colder temperature, there was no further danger of slides, and to avoid the avalanche that had turned Morganstein back, the prospector shaped his course more directly into the canyon. Soon he was below the clouds; between their ragged edges a few stars appeared. Beyond a buttress shone a ruddy illumination. Some fires stood against it darkly. It was the fire Marcia and Elizabeth were watching at the place where he had cached the surplus supplies that morning. It served as a beacon when the crispness ceased, and for an interval he was forced to mush laboriously through soft drifts. Then he came to a first bare spot. It was in crossing this rough ground that Frederic showed signs of returning consciousness. But Banks gave him no attention. He had caught a strange sound on the wind. Others, far off, rose while he listened. Presently, looking back beyond the end of the ridge that divided the upper gorge, he saw twinkling lights. They were the lanterns of the searchers at the wrecked train.

The little man did not exclaim. He did not pray. His was the anguish of soul which finds no expression.

CHAPTER XXVII

KISMET. AN ACT OF GOD

AFTERWARDS, some who compared the slope where the Oriental Limited had stood, with the terrible pitches along the lower switchback, said: "It was Fate;" and the defense in the damage suits against the Great Northern, which were decided in favor of the company, called that catastrophe at Cascade tunnel "An Act of God." In either solution, the fact that counted was that no avalanche had occurred at this point before; mountain men had regarded it as absolutely safe. At noon that day, a rumor reached the stalled train that a slide at the front had struck one of the rotaries. Laborers, at their own peril, had excavated the crew, but the plow was out of commission, and the track was buried sixty feet under fresh tons of snow and rock and fallen timber. The Limited could not move within forty-eight hours, perhaps three days.

Tisdale picked up his bag and went out to the observation platform. He knew that to attempt to follow the railroad through those swaths the avalanches had left, under the burned skeletons of trees ready to topple at the first pressure of other bodies of snow, was to take one's life needlessly in his hands; but there was another way. The slope from the track at the portal dipped through a park of hemlock and fir, and the blaze that had swept the lower mountainside had not reached this timber; the great boughs, like fishers' nets, supported their dripping accumulations. Also, at this altitude, there was no under-

growth. To make the drop directly into the canyon and follow the river down to Scenic Hot Springs meant little more to him than a bracing tramp of a few hours.

Snowshoes were a necessity, and the demand at the little station had long exceeded the supply, but the operator was able to furnish the length of bale rope Tisdale asked of him. From the office door, where he had curiously followed to see the line put to use, he watched the traveler secure two pliable branches of hemlock, of the same size, which he brought to the station platform, and, having stripped them of needles, bent into ovals. Then, laying aside one, he commenced to weave half of the rope net-wise, filling the space in the frame he held. A sudden intelligence leaped in the agent's face. "That's simple enough," he exclaimed. "And they'll carry you as far as you want to go."

Tisdale smiled, nodding, and picked up the remaining frame.

"Strange I never saw any one try the scheme before," the operator commented. "I've weathered a good many blockades up here; seen lots of fellows, men whose time was money, bucking it out to open track. But I bet the first time this idea struck you you were up against it. I bet it's a yarn worth listening to."

Tisdale glanced up; the genial lines deepened. "It was a situation to clear a man's head. There was snow from three to seven feet deep ahead of me and going soft. My snowshoes, lost with the outfit at a hole in a Yukon crossing, were swinging down-stream under the ice. I had two sea biscuit in my pocket and a few inches of dried venison, with the nearest road-house over fifty miles away."

"Well, that was hard luck," the agent shook his head gravely.

"It was the best kind of luck," responded Tisdale quickly, "to find myself with that rope in my hands and

a nice little spruce on the bank to supply frames enough for 'a regiment. I was rigging a kind of derrick to ease my sled up the sharp pitch from the crossing."

"I see," said the operator thoughtfully, "and the sled broke through. Lost it and the outfit. But your dogs — saved them, didn't you?"

"All but two." Tisdale's brows contracted. "They were dragged under the ice before I could cut the traces. There was leather enough on the leaders to bind those shoes on, but"—and the humorous lines deepened again—"a couple of straps, from an old suitcase, if you happen to have one, would be an improvement."

The operator hurried into the office and, after a vigorous search among the miscellaneous articles stored under his desk, found an old valise, from which he detached the desired straps. Tisdale adjusted the improvised shoes. "I will send them back by a brakeman from Scenic Springs," he said, rising from his seat on the edge of the platform. "You can keep them for a pattern."

"All right," the operator laughed. "If you do, I'll have to lay in a stock of bale rope."

It was beginning to snow again, big, soft flakes, and the wind, skimming the drifts, speedily filled the broad, light rings Tisdale left in his wake. A passenger with a baby in his arms stood on the observation platform, and the child held out its mittened hands to him, crowing, with little springs. They had formed an acquaintance during the delay in the Rockies, which had grown to intimacy in the Cascades, and Hollis slipped the carrying strap of his bag over his shoulder and stopped to toss him a snowball, before he turned from the track. "Good-by, Joey," he said. "I am coming back for you if there's a chance."

The operator, shivering, closed the door. "Never saw such a man," he commented. "But if he's lived in

Alaska, a Cascade blizzard would just be a light breeze to him." He paused to put a huge stick of wood in the stove, then, after the habit of solitary humanity, resumed his soliloquy. "I bet he's seen life. I bet, whoever he is, he's somewheres near the top of the ladder. I bet, in a bunch of men, he does the thinking. And I bet what he wants, I don't care what's piled in his way, he gets."

As he descended, the trees closed behind Tisdale, rank on rank, and were enveloped in the swaying curtain of the snow. Always a certain number surrounded him; they seemed to march with him like a bodyguard. But he was oblivious of the peril that from the higher peak had appeared so imminent to Lucky Banks. When the snow-cloud lifted, the Pass was still completely veiled from him, and the peak the prospector's party had ascended was then cut off by the intervening ridge. He had crossed the headwaters and was working along this slope down the watercourse, when the noise of the first avalanche startled the gorge. A little later a far shout came to his quick ear. He answered, but when another call reached him from a different point, high up beyond the ridge, he was silent. He knew a company, separated in the neighborhood of the slide, was trying to get into communication. Then, in the interval that he waited, listening, began the ominous roar of the mightier cataclysm. The mountain he had descended seemed to heave; its front gave way; the ridge on which he stood trembled at the concussion.

Instantly, before the clamor ceased and the first cries reached him, Tisdale knew what had occurred. His sense of location told him. Then the fact was pressed on him that some on the unfortunate train still survived. He saw that the course he had taken from the west portal was no longer possible, but by keeping the curve of the ridge which joined the mountain slope and formed the top of the gorge, and by working upward, he should be able to gain

the upper edge of the slide where rose the human sounds. He took this way. His shoulder, turned a little, met the lower boughs with the dip and push of the practiced woodsman, and even on the up-grade the distance fell behind him swiftly. Always subconsciously, as he moved, he saw that baby crowing him a good-by, and the young father smiling Godspeed from the observation platform; sometimes the girl mother with tender brown eyes watched him from the background. Suppose their coach, which had directly preceded the observation car, had escaped; the snow-cloud, parting on the mountain top, showed that the roofs of the station still remained.

After a while he noticed two men working downward from the portal along the swath of the avalanche. One, he conjectured, was the operator, but they stopped some distance above him and commenced to remove sections of the debris. Then Hollis saw before him some brilliant spots on the snow. They proved to be only pieces of stained glass from a shattered transom. The side of the car with denuded window casings rested a few feet higher, and a corner of the top of the coach protruded from under the fallen skeleton of a fir. The voices now seemed all around him. Somewhere a man was shouting "Help!" Another groaned, cursing, and, deeper in the wreckage, rose a woman's muffled, continuous screaming. But, nearer than the rest, a child was crying piteously. He reached the intact portion of the crushed roof and found the baby sitting unhurt on a clear breadth of snow. The body of the father was pinned hopelessly beneath the tree, and the mother lay under the fragment of roof, an iron bar on her tender eyes. It was as though Destiny, having destroyed them, whimsically threw a charmed circle around this remaining atom of the family.

"Well, Joey," Tisdale said quietly, "I've come back for you."

Instantly the child stopped crying and turned to listen; then, seeing Tisdale, he began to crow, rocking his little body and catching up handfuls of snow to demonstrate his delight. The hands and round bud of a mouth were blue.

"Cold, isn't it, Joey?" And he took the baby in his arms. "We can't find your coat and mittens, but here is a nice blanket."

He stooped, as he spoke, and pulled the blanket from under a broken door, and the child nestled its face in his neck, telling him in expressive, complaining sounds the story of his terror and discomfort.

A man burrowed out of the snow above the log. His leg was injured, but he began to creep, dragging it, in the direction of the woman's voice. "I'm coming, Mary," he cried. "For God's sake, stop."

Tisdale picked up a strip from the broken door and hurried to his aid. He put the child down and used the board as a shovel, and Joey, watching from the peephole in his blanket, laughed and crowed again. Up the slope the operator and his companion had extricated a brakeman, who, forgetting his own injuries, joined the little force of rescuers.

At last the cries ceased. Haste was no longer imperative. The remaining coaches were buried under tons of snow and debris. Weeks of labor, with relays of men, might not reach them all. And it was time to let the outside world know. The telephone lines were down, the telegraph out of commission, and Tisdale, with the baby to bear him company, started to carry the news to Scenic Hot Springs.

It had grown very cold when he rounded the top of the gorge. The arrested thaw hung in myriads of small icicles on every bough; they changed to rubies when the late sun blazed out briefly; the trees seemed strung with gems;

the winds that gathered on the high dome above the upper canyon rushed across the summit of the ridge. They fluted every pipe, and, as though it were an enchanted forest, all the small pendants on all the branches changed to striking cymbals and silver bells. The baby slept as warm and safe in his blanket as though he had not left his mother's arms.

Once there came a momentary lull, and on the silence, far off — so far it seemed hardly more than a human breath drifting with the lighter current that still set towards him from the loftier peak — Tisdale heard some one calling him. His pulses missed their beat and raced on at fever heat. He believed, in that halting instant, it was Beatriz Weatherbee. Then the gale, making up for the pause, swept down in fury, and he hurried under the shelter of the ridge with the child. He told himself there had been no voice; it was an illusion. That the catastrophe, following so closely on his illness, had unhinged him a little. The Morganstein party had doubtless returned to Seattle at the beginning of the thaw; and even had Mrs. Weatherbee remained at Scenic Springs, it was not probable she had strayed far from the comfort and safety of the hotel. And recalling that night she had passed in the Wenatchee mountains, he smiled.

As twilight fell, a ruddy illumination outlined the ridge. He conjectured that the men he had heard early in the afternoon in the vicinity of the first slide were a party of belated hunters, who had camped in the upper canyon. They must have known of the greater avalanche; possibly of the disaster. They may have sent a messenger to the Springs and kindled this beacon to guide any one who might choose this way to bring the news from the portal. At least they would be able to direct him to the shortest cut; serve him the cup of coffee of which he was in need. So, coming to the end of the ridge where the canyons met,

he turned in the direction of the fire, and found — two waiting women.

Their presence alone was an explanation. Mrs. Feversham had only to say Lucky Banks had led their party, in the ascent of the peak that brilliant morning, and instantly everything was clear to Tisdale. The voice he had heard from the top of the ridge was not an illusion. She had called him.

"It was snowing," he said, interrupting the story, "but if they left the shadow of a trail, Banks found it. There are two of them, though, and up there — it's cold." Then, having gone a few steps, he remembered the child and came back to put him in Elizabeth's arms. "His father and mother are dead," he explained briefly, "but he hasn't a bruise. When he wakes, he is going to be hungry."

So, forgetting those wearing hours of rescue work, and without the coffee for which he had intended to ask, he started on the prospector's trail. In a little while, as he skirted the foot of the slide, he heard a great commotion on the slope beyond. It was Lucky Banks easing his human toboggan down the last pitch to the canyon floor.

The two men stood a silent moment scanning each other in the uncertain light across that load. Tisdale's eyes were searching for an answer to the question he could not ask, but the prospector, breathing hard, was trying to cover the emotion Tisdale's unexpected appearance had roused.

"Hello, Hollis," he said at last. "Is that you? I had to see after Dave's wife, but I thought likely, when I got her to camp, I'd take a little hike up to the tunnel and look you up."

But Tisdale, not finding the answer for which he looked, sank to his knee beside the load and loosened the straps. Then he lifted a corner of the rug that protected her face,

and at the sight of it, so white, so still, his heart cried. "Little soldier!" he said over and over and, as though he hoped to warm them, laid his cheek gently to her blue lips. "You called me! I heard you. I failed you, too!"

Then a fluttering breath steadied him. Instantly the iron in the man cropped through. He felt her pulse, her heart, as though she had been some stranger from the unfortunate train and, moving her to a level place, fixed her head low and began firmly, with exceeding care, those expedients to eliminate the frost and start the circulation that Banks had already hurriedly tried. His great, warm personality enfolded her; he worked tirelessly, as though he was determined to infuse her numb veins with his own vigor. When the prospector would have aided him, he wished to do everything alone, and directed the miner's attention to Frederic Morganstein, who showed signs of returning consciousness.

But the intrepid little man failed to respond. "I guess likely he will pull through," he said dryly. "He had a pretty good shaking up coming down, and I'd better run around to camp and get a bottle of port I cached this morning. The snipe got away with my flask; used the last drop, likely, before she needed it." His voice took a higher pitch, and he added over his shoulder, as he started in the direction of the fire: "He made a windbreak of her."

When he returned presently with the wine, Frederic was filling the night with his complaints and groans. But neither of the men gave him any attention. That was left for Marcia, who had followed the prospector.

Beatriz Weatherbee was still unconscious. She was carried to the camp and laid in a sheltered place remote from the fire. Then Lucky Banks volunteered to go to Scenic Springs with the news of the train dis-

aster, and to bring an extra man with lanterns and a stretcher. He was well on the way when Morganstein crept in. Marcia found him a seat on the end of a log and, wrapping the cached rug about him, regaled him with the recovered portion of the luncheon. But it was long after that when Beatriz Weatherbee's eyelids fluttered open. Tisdale drew a little more into the shadows, waiting, and the first to come within her range of vision was the child. He was sitting on his blanket in the strong glow, and just beyond him Elizabeth, who had found a tin of cream in the cache and had been feeding him, was putting away the cup. Joey faced the waking woman and, catching her look, he put out his hands, rocking gayly, and crowed. Instantly a flash of intelligence lighted her face. She smiled and tried to stretch out her arms. "Come!" she said.

Elizabeth caught up the child and placed him beside her on the rug. He put out his soft, moist fingers, touching her face curiously, with gathering doubt. Then, satisfied this was not his mother, as in the uncertain light he must have supposed, he drew back with a whimper and clung to Elizabeth.

At the same moment Mrs. Weatherbee's smile changed to disappointment. "His eyes are brown, Elizabeth," she said, "and my baby's were blue, like mine." And she turned her face, weeping; not hysterically, like a woman physically unstrung, but with the slow, deep sobs of a woman who has wakened from a dream of one whom she has greatly loved — and buried.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SURRENDER

TISDALE had not seen Beatriz Weatherbee since she had been brought semi-conscious from the foot of the mountain, but he learned from the hotel physician the following morning that she was able to travel on the special train which was coming from Seattle to transport the Morganstein party home. The first inquiry, after news of the disaster reached the outside world, was from Joey's grandfather, a lumberman on Puget Sound. Put in communication with Tisdale, he telephoned he would arrive at the Springs on the special. So, leaving the child in charge of the housekeeper, Hollis returned to the west portal, to join the little force of rescuers. It was then no longer a question of life-saving, but of identification. The Swiss chalet, which had ceased to be the mecca of pleasure-seekers, had become a morgue.

But Lucky Banks, who went with him, had received a message from Mrs. Weatherbee, and in the interval that Tisdale was busy with long-distance and disposing of Joey, the prospector went up to her room. She was pale and very weak, but she smiled as he approached her couch and held out her hand. "No, the right one," she said, and added, taking it with a gentle pressure, "I know, now, what it is — to be cold."

The little man nodded. His face worked, and he hurried to conceal the maimed hand in his pocket. "But the doctor says you'll pull through good as new," he commented. "I am proud to know that; my, yes."

"And I am proud of you, Mr. Banks. It seems incredible, but Miss Morganstein told me you rescued her brother, too. I've tried and tried to remember, but I am not able. You must have carried me, at least, all of the way."

Banks glanced at Elizabeth, who was seated beyond the couch. She had laid a warning finger to her lips and shook her head. "That was dead easy coming down-grade," he answered. "And that little blow up there on the mountain top wasn't anything to speak of, alongside a regular Alaska blizzard. If I'd had to weight my pockets with rocks, that would have been something doing. I might have felt then that I was squaring myself with Dave Weatherbee."

"I understand," she said slowly, "but," and she smiled again, "I am grateful, Mr. Banks, just the same. Perhaps, since you loved David so much, you will regard it as a kind of compensation that I am going on with the project."

"Is that so?" The little man beamed. "Well, the house is all done and waiting, my, yes, whenever you are ready to move over."

"Why, Beatriz," said Elizabeth in alarm, "I am going to take that desert tract off your hands. I've been interested in reclamation work for months." And looking at Banks, she added significantly: "I am afraid she is talking too much."

"Likely," replied the prospector, rising, "and I am due to take a little hike up the canyon with Hollis Tisdale."

"Mr. Tisdale?" she asked, with a quick brightening of her face. "Then he is quite well again. Miss Morganstein told me he was saved—from that unfortunate train," and she added, shivering and closing her eyes, "I remember—that."

"I couldn't have got there in time," Banks hurried to explain, "even if you had given up making the summit. Likely I'd have got caught by the slide, and Hollis was half-way to the Springs and 'feeling fit as a moose' when it started. Well, good-by, ma'am; take care of yourself."

"Good-by, Mr. Banks," and she smiled once more. "You may expect me at Hesperides Vale in a few days; as soon as my things at Vivian Court are packed." And she added, with the color softly warming her cheek, "Mr. Tisdale might like to know that. He always wished to see David's project carried through."

And the little man replied from the door: "I'll tell him, ma'am, my, yes."

The special, which brought other seekers besides Joey's grandfather, also conveyed Jimmie Daniels. It was his last assignment with the *Press*; he and Geraldine were to be married within the week and assume the editorial position at Weatherbee. And he pushed up over Tisdale's trail, now become well broken, eager to make a final scoop and his best one. Hours later, when he should have been back at Scenic Hot Springs, rushing his copy through to his paper, he still remained on the slope below the west portal to carry out the brief and forceful instructions of the man who directed and dominated everybody; who knew in each emergency the one thing to do. Once Jimmie found himself aiding Banks to wrap a woman's body in a blanket to be lowered by tackle down the mountainside. She was young, not older than Geraldine, and the sight of her — rounded cheek, dimpled chin, arm so beautifully molded — all with the life snuffed out without a moment's warning — gave him a sensation of being smothered. He was seized with a compelling desire to get away, and to conquer his panic, he asked the prospector whether this man was not the superintendent of the mountain division.

The mining man replied: "No, that's the railroad boss over there with the gang handling the derrick; this is Tisdale, Hollis Tisdale of Alaska and Washington, D. C. You ought to have heard of him in your line of business if you never happened to see him before."

Then Jimmie, turning to look more directly at the stranger, hastily dropped his face. "You are right," he said softly, "I've known him by sight some time."

Afterwards, while they were having coffee with the station master, Daniels asked Banks how he and Tisdale happened to be at Cascade Tunnel. "I was putting in a little time at the Springs," Banks responded, "but Hollis was a passenger on the stalled train. He took a notion to hike down to the hotel just ahead of the slide."

"You mean that man who has taken charge out there," exclaimed the operator. "I had a talk with him before he started; he was rigging up some snowshoes. He said he was from Alaska, and I put him down for one of those bonanza kings."

"He is," said Banks in his high key. "What he don't know about minerals ain't worth knowing, and he owns one of the finest layouts in the north, Dave Weatherbee's bore."

"The Aurora mine," confirmed Daniels. "And I presume there isn't a man better known, or as well liked, in Alaska."

Banks nodded. "Dave and him was a team. The best known and the best liked in the whole country. And likely there's men on the top seats in Washington, D. C., would be glad of a chance to shake hands with Hollis Tisdale."

"I knew he was somewhere near the top," commented the operator. "He can handle men. I never saw such a fellow. Why, he must have got half-way to the Springs when the slide started, but he was back, climbing up

along the edge of it to the wreck, almost before it quit thundering. And he took out a live baby, without a damage mark, and all its folks lying right there dead, before the rest of us got in earshot."

Daniels put down his sandwich and took out his neglected notebook. He gathered all the detail the ready operator could supply: how Tisdale had wrapped the child in a blanket and carried him from place to place, talking to him in his nice, friendly way, amusing him, keeping him quiet, while he worked with the strength of two men to liberate other survivors. And how, when none was left to save, he had taken the baby in his arms and gone to break trail to the Springs to send out news of the disaster. All that the station master and Banks could not tell him, with the name and prominence of Joey's family, Jimmie added later at the chalet, and he finished with a skilful reference to the papoose, killed by accident so many years before. It was a great story. It went into the paper as it stood. And when the day came to leave the *Press* office, the chief, shaking hands with his "novelist," said it was a fine scoop, and he had always known Jimmie had it in him to make good; he was sorry to lose him. But the Society Editor, reading between the lines, told him it was the greatest apology he could have made. She was proud of him.

At Vivian Court late that afternoon, Elizabeth read the story to Beatriz Weatherbee. Her couch was drawn into the sunny alcove, where, from her pillows, she might watch the changing light on Mount Rainier. Finally, when Elizabeth finished, Beatriz broke the silence. "He must have passed down the canyon while we were there."

"Yes, he did. He carried one end of your stretcher all the way to the Springs." Then Elizabeth asked: "Don't you remember the baby, either? He had brown eyes."

"I seem to remember a child," she answered slowly, "a baby sitting in the firelight, but"—and she shook her head, "I've dreamed so many dreams."

"He was a fact; a perfect dear. I should have adopted him, if his relatives hadn't been so prominent and rich. And you, too, fell instantly in love with him. You wanted him in your arms the moment you opened your eyes."

Elizabeth paused with a straight look from under her heavy brows and while she hesitated there was a knock at the door. She threw it open and a porter brought in one of those showy Japanese shrubs in an ornate jardinière, such as Frederic Morganstein so often used as an expression of his regard. His card hung by a ribbon from a branch, like a present on a Christmas tree, and when the boy had gone, she untied it and carried it to Mrs. Weatherbee. "I wish you could marry Frederic and settle it all," she said. "Japan is lovely in the spring."

Beatriz, who had taken the card indifferently, allowed it to drop without reading it. Her glance rested again on the shining dome.

"I told him I would ask you to see him a few moments to-night," Elizabeth resumed. "He is feeling miserably. He says he was ill when we made the ascent that day and never should have left the hotel; his high temperature and the altitude affected his head. He believes he must have said things that offended or frightened you — things he wasn't responsible for." She paused, then, for a woman who had been so schooled to hold herself in hand as Elizabeth Morganstein, went on uncertainly: "He is just a plain business man, used to going straight to a point, but not many men care so much for a woman as he does for you. You could mold him like wax. He says all he wants now — if he did make a mistake — is a chance to wipe it out; start with a clean slate."

Mrs. Weatherbee rose from the couch. She stood a

moment meeting Elizabeth's earnest look. The shadow of a smile touched her mouth, but well-springs of affection brimmed her eyes. "We cannot wipe out our mistakes, dear," she said. "They are indelible. We have to accept them, study them, use them as a rule from which to work out the problems of our lives. There is no going back, no starting over, if we have missed an easier way. Elizabeth, in one hour on that mountain I saw more of the true Frederic Morganstein than in all the years I had known him before. In the great moments of life, I should have no influence with him. Even for your sake, dear, I could not marry him. I do not want to see him any more."

There was a silence, then Elizabeth said: "In that case, I am going to ease things for you. I am going to buy that desert land. Now, don't say a word. I am going to pay you Lucky Banks' price, and, of course, for the improvements whatever is right."

"But it is not on the market," replied Beatriz. "I told you I had decided to live there. I hoped — you would like to go with me. For awhile, at least, you might find it interesting."

Elizabeth tried to dissuade her. It was ridiculous. It was monstrous. She was not strong enough. It would be throwing her life away, as surely as to transplant a tender orchid to that burning sage-brush country. But in the end she said: "Well, Bee, then I'll go with you."

CHAPTER XXIX

BACK TO HESPERIDES VALE

THE Mayor of Weatherbee stopped his new, six-passenger car at the curb in front of the completed brick block; not at the corner which was occupied by the Merchants' National Bank, but at the adjoining entrance, above which shone the neat gilt sign: "Madame Lucile's." He stood for a moment surveying the window display, which was exceedingly up-to-date, showing the prevailing color scheme of green or cerise in the millinery, softened by a background of mauve and taupe in the arrangement of the gowns. A card, placed unobtrusively in the corner of the plate glass, announced that Madame Lucile, formerly with Sedgewick-Wilson of Seattle, was prepared to give personal attention to all orders.

Bailey himself that day was equipped in a well-made suit from the tailoring establishment on the opposite side of the building. Though he had not yet gathered that *avouirdupois* which is associated with the dignity of office, there was in his square young frame an undeniable promise. Already he carried himself with the deliberation of a man whose future is assured, and his mouth took those upward curves of one who is humorously satisfied with himself and his world.

There were no customers when he entered, and since it was the hour when her assistant was out at lunch, Madame, attired in a gown of dark blue velvet, her black hair arranged with elaborate care, was alone in the shop. And Bailey's glance, having traveled the length of the

soft green carpet to the farthest mirror, returned in final approval to her. "This certainly is swell," he said. "It's like a sample right out of Chicago. But I knew you could do it, the minute Mrs. Banks mentioned you. Why, the first time I saw you — it was on the street the day I struck Wenatchee — I told myself: 'This town can't be very wild and woolly if it can turn out anything as classy as that.'"

Madame laughed. "I must have looked like a moving fashion plate to attract attention that way. I feel a little over-dressed now, after wearing the uniform in Sedgewick-Wilson's so long; but Mrs. Banks said I ought to wear nice clothes to advertise the store."

Bailey tipped back his head at that, laughing softly. "I guess your silent partner is going to be the power behind the throne, all right."

Madame nodded, with the humor still lingering in her brown eyes. "But it was good advice. I sold a gown like this to my first customer this morning. And she had only come in to see millinery; she hadn't meant to look at gowns. But she liked this one the moment she saw it."

"Is that so? Well, I don't wonder. It certainly looks great — on you."

Madame flushed and turned her face to look off through the plate glass door. "Why," she exclaimed, "you didn't tell me your new automobile had come." She moved a few steps, sweeping the car with admiring eyes. "Isn't it luxurious though, and smart? But you deserve it; you deserve everything that's coming to you now, staying here, sticking it out as you have in the heat and sand. I often thought of it summer days while I was over on the Sound."

"You did?" questioned Bailey in pleased surprise. "Well, I am glad to know that. I wonder whether you

ever thought over the time we tramped the railroad ties up to Leavenworth to that little dance? ”

“Often,” she responded quickly. “And how we came back in the Oleson wagon, riding behind with our heels hanging over, and the dust settling like powder on our party clothes. But I had the loveliest time. It was the starriest night, with moonlight coming home, and I danced every number.”

“Seven times with me,” returned the mayor.

“I wanted to learn the two-step,” she explained hastily.

“And I wanted to teach you,” he laughed. “But say, how would you like to take a little spin up the Leavenworth road this evening, in the new car? ”

“Oh, that would be delightful.” Madame Lucile glowed. “With a party?” she asked.

“Well, I thought of asking Daniels and his wife to go with us. I am on the way to the station now, to meet them. And Mrs. Weatherbee and Miss Morganstein are due on the same train. I promised Mr. Banks I would take them out to the Orchards in the machine; but we are to motor around to the new bungalow first, to leave the bride and Jimmie and have luncheon.”

“I know. Mrs. Banks is going to have the table in that wide veranda looking down the river. I would like to be there when they find out that dear little bungalow is their wedding present. It was perfectly lovely of Mrs. Banks to think of it; and of you to give them that beautiful lot on the point. You can see Hesperides Vale for miles and miles to the lower gap.”

Bailey smiled. “Mrs. Banks said it was a good way to use up the lumber that was left over from the ranch house. And that bungalow certainly makes a great showing for the town. It raised the value of the adjoining lots. I sold three before the shingles were on the walls,

and the people who bought them thought they had a snap."

"All the same, it is a lovely present," said Madame Lucile.

"There's the train, whistling up the valley," said the mayor, but he paused to ask, almost with diffidence, as he turned to the door: "Say, what do you think of this tie?"

"I like it." She nodded, with a reassuring smile. "And it's a nice shade for you; it brings out the blue in your eyes."

The mayor laughed gaily. "I ought to wear it steady after that, but I am coming to black ones with a frock coat and silk hat. I am going to begin to-morrow, when those German scientists, on their way home from the Orient, stop to see Hesperides Vale."

"Oh, I hope you will wear this nice business suit, unless they come late in the afternoon. It seems more sensible here on the edge of the desert, and even if you are the first mayor to do it, I know, the world over, there isn't another as young."

Bailey grew thoughtful. "The mayor in Chicago always wore a Prince Albert. Why, that long coat and silk hat stood for the office. They were the most important part of him. But good-by," he said hastily, as the train whistled again, nearer, "I'll call for you at seven."

Ten minutes later, the mayor stood on the station platform shaking hands with Mrs. Weatherbee. "Say, I am surprised," he said. "I often wondered what you thought of the vale. Lighter told me how you drove those colts through that day, and I was disappointed not to hear from you. You didn't let me know you had an investment already, and it never occurred to me, afterwards, that you were our Mrs. Weatherbee."

Then, introductions being over, he assisted Miss Mor-

ganstein into the tonneau with the bridal couple and gave the seat in front to Mrs. Weatherbee. He drove very slowly up the new thoroughfare, past the Bailey building, where she expressed her astonishment at the inviting window display of the millinery store. He explained that offices for the *Weatherbee Record* had been reserved on the second floor, and that in the hall, in the third story, the first inaugural ball was to be given the following night. It had been postponed a few days until her arrival, and he hoped he might have the privilege of leading the grand march with her. And, Mrs. Weatherbee having thanked him, with the pleasure dancing in her eyes, Bailey pointed out the new city hospital, a tall, airy structure, brave in fresh paint, which was equipped with a resident physician and three trained nurses, including Miss Purdy, the milliner's sister, who was on her way from Washington to join the force.

After that they motored through the residence district, and Mrs. Weatherbee expressed greater wonder and delight at the rows of thrifty homes, each with its breadth of green lawn and budding shrubbery, where hardly six months ago had been unreclaimed acres of sage. And so, at last, they came to the city park, where the road wound smooth and firm between broad stretches of velvety green, broken by beds of blossoming tulips, nodding daffodils, clumps of landscape foliage putting forth new leaves. Sprinklers, supplied by a limpid canal that followed the drive, played here, there, everywhere, and under all this moisture and the warm rays of the spring sun, the light soil teemed with awakening life. Then, finally, the car skirted a low, broad mound, in which was set the source of the viaduct, a basin of masonry, brimming with water crystal clear and fed by two streams that gushed from a pedestal of stone on the farther rim. "How beautiful!" she exclaimed. "How incredible! And there is to be a

statue to complete it. A faun, a water nymph, some figure to symbolize the spirit of the place."

"I can't tell you much about the statue," replied Bailey, watching the curve ahead. "Mr. Banks engaged the sculptor; some noted man in the east. He is carrying the responsibility; it was his idea. But it was to have been in place, ready to be unveiled by the fifteenth, and there was some delay."

After that, the mayor was silent, devoting his attention to the speeding car. They left the park and, taking the river road, arrived presently at the bungalow. The shingles still lacked staining, the roof was incomplete, but a sprinkler threw rainbow mist over the new lawn, which was beginning to show shades of green. A creeper, planted at the corner of the veranda, already sent out pale, crinkled shoots.

Lucky Banks came beaming down the steps, and Annabel, in a crisp frock of royal blue taffeta, stood smiling a welcome as the automobile stopped. Then Bailey, springing down to throw open the door of the tonneau, lifted his voice to say: "And this — is the home of the Editor of the *Weatherbee Record* and Mrs. Daniels."

They did not at once grasp his meaning, and the prospector made it clear as they went up to the veranda. "The house is a wedding present from Mrs. Banks," he said; "and Mr. Bailey, here, put up the lot, so's I thought this would come in handy; it will take quite a bunch of furniture."

There was a silent moment while Geraldine stood regarding the envelope he had put in her hand. She was looking her best in a trim, tailored suit of gray. There was a turquoise facing to the brim of her smart gray hat, but her only ornaments were a sorority pin fastened to the lapel of her coat and a gold button that secured her watch in the small breast pocket made for it. At

last she looked up, an unusual flush warmed her face, and she began: "It's perfectly lovely of you — we are so surprised — we never can thank you enough."

But Jimmie turned away. He stood looking down the valley in the direction of that place, not very far off, where his mother had carried water up the steep slope in the burning desert sun. His forehead creased; he closed his lips tight over a rising sob. Then Geraldine laid her hand on his arm. "Do you understand what these people have done for us?" she asked unconventionally. "Did you hear?"

Jimmie swung around. His glance met Annabel's. "I can't explain how I feel about it," he burst out, "but I know if my mother could have been here now, it — this — would have paid her for all — she missed. I don't deserve it — but Geraldine does; and I pledge myself to stay by the *Weatherbee Record* as long as you want me to. I don't see how I can help making good."

Then Annabel, winking hard, hastily led the way over the house; and, presently, when the party returned to the table in the veranda, and the Japanese boy she had brought from the ranch house was successfully passing the fried chicken, she wanted to know about the wedding.

"Yes, we tried to have it quiet," responded Jimmie, "and we planned it so the taxi would just make our train; but the fellows caught on and were waiting for us at the station, full force, with their pocketfuls of rice and shoes. They hardly let us get aboard."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Annabel. "You might as well have been married in church. You'd have looked pretty in a train and veil," she said, addressing Geraldine, who was seated on her right. "Not but what you don't look nice in gray. And I like your suit real well; it's a fine piece of goods; the kind to stand the desert

dust. But I would have liked to see you in white, with a blaze of lights and decorations and a crowd."

Geraldine laughed. "We had a nice little wedding, and the young men from the office made up for their noise. They gave the porter a handsome case of silver at the last moment, to bring to me."

"And," supplemented Jimmie, "there was a handsome silver tea service from the chief. He told her she had been a credit to the staff, and he would find it hard to replace her. Think of that coming from the head of a big daily. It makes me feel guilty. But she is to have full latitude in the new paper; society, clubs, equal suffrage if she says so; anything she writes goes with the *Weather-bee Record*."

"If I were you, I'd have that down in writing." Annabel looked from Daniels to the bride, and her lip curled whimsically. "They all talk that way at first, as though the earth turned round for one woman, and the whole crowd ought to stop to watch her go by. He pretends, so far as he is concerned, she can stump the county for prohibition or lead the suffragette parade, but, afterwards, he gets to taking the other view. Instead of thanking his lucky stars the nicest girl in the world picked him out of the bunch, he begins to think she naturally was proud that the best one wanted her. Then, before they've been married two years, he starts trying to make her over into some other kind of a woman. Why, I know one man right here in Hesperides Vale who set to making a Garden of Eden out of a sandhole in the mountains, just because it belonged to a certain girl." She paused an instant, while her glance moved to Banks, and the irony went out of her voice. "He could have bought the finest fruit ranch in the valley, all under irrigation and coming into bearing, for he had the money, but he went to wasting it on that piece of unreclaimed sage

desert. And now that he has got it all in shape, he's talking of opening a big farm in Alaska."

Banks laughed uneasily. "The boys need it up there," he said in his high key. "Besides, I always get more fun out of making new ground over. It's such mighty good soil here in Hesperides Vale things grow themselves soon's the water is turned on. It don't leave a man enough to do. And we could take a little run down to the ranch, any time; we could count on always wintering here, my, yes."

Annabel smiled. "He thinks by mid-summer he can take me right into the interior, in that cranky red car. And I don't know but what I am ready to risk it; there are places I'd like to see — where he was caught his first winter in a blizzard, and where he picked up the nuggets for my necklace. You remember it — don't you? — Mrs. Daniels. I wore it that night in Seattle we went to hear "Carmen."

"I certainly do remember. It was the most wonderful thing in the theater that night, and fit for an empress." Involuntarily Geraldine glanced down at her own solitary jewel. It flashed a lovely blue light as she moved her hand.

Annabel followed the glance. "Your ring is a beauty," she said. "Not many young men, just starting in business for themselves, would have thought they could afford a diamond like that."

Geraldine laughed, flushing a little. "It seems the finest in the world to me," she replied almost shyly. "And it ought to show higher light and color than any other; the way it was bought was so splendid."

"Do you mean the way the money was earned to buy it?" inquired Annabel.

Geraldine nodded. "It was the price, exactly, of his first magazine story. Perhaps you read it. It was pub-

lished in the March issue of *Sampson's*, and the editors liked it so well they asked to see more of his work."

Jimmie looked at his wife in mingled protest and surprise. He had believed she, as well as himself, had wished to have that story quickly forgotten. "It is an Indian story," she pursued; "about a poor little papoose that was accidentally killed. It was a personal experience of Mr. Tisdale's."

Mrs. Banks had not read it, but the prospector pushed aside his sherbet glass and, laying his arms on the table, leaned towards Geraldine. "Was that papoose cached under a log?" he asked softly. "And was its mother berrying with a bunch of squaws up the ridge?"

"Yes," smiled Geraldine. "I see you have read it."

"No, but I heard a couple of men size it up aboard the train coming from Scenic Hot Springs. And once," he went on with gathering tenseness, "clear up the Tanana, I heard Dave and Hollis talking it over. My, yes, it seems like I can see them now; they was the huskiest, cleanest-cut, openest-faced team that ever mushed a trail. It was one of those nights when the stars come close and friendly, and the camp-fire blazes and crackles straight to heaven and sets a man thinking; and Tisdale started it by saying if he could cut one record out of his past he guessed the rest could bear daylight. Then Dave told him he was ready to stand by that one, too. And Hollis said it was knowing that had taken the edge off, but it hadn't put the breath back into that papoose. Of course he never suspicioned for a minute the kid was in the road when he jumped that log, and the heart went out of him when he picked it up and saw what he was responsible for. They had to tell me the whole story, and I wish you could have heard 'em. Dave smoothing things when Hollis got too hard on himself, and Hollis chipping in again for fear I wouldn't get full weight for Dave's

part. And the story sure enough does hinge on him. Likely that's why Tisdale gave it to your magazine; to show up Dave Weatherbee. But those men on the train — they had the seat in front of me so's I heard it plain — lost their bearings. They left out Dave and put Hollis in a bad light. He was 'caught red-handed and never was brought to an honest trial.' And it was clear besides, being 'hand in glove with the Secretary of the Interior' he had a 'pull with the Federal court.' I couldn't stand for it." The prospector's voice reached high pitch, his forehead creased in many fine lines, his eyes scintillated their blue glacier lights, and he added, striking the table with his clenched hand, "I up and says: 'It's all a damn lie.'"

There was a silence. The self-possession and swiftness of the Japanese boy saved the sherbet glass and its contents, but the mayor, who had been interrupted in a confidential quotation of real estate values to Miss Morganstein, sat staring at Banks in amazement. A spark of admiration shot through the astonishment in Annabel's eyes then, catching the little man's aggressive glance, she covered her pride with her ironical smile. Mrs. Weatherbee was the only one who did not look at Banks. Her inscrutable face was turned to the valley. She might never have heard of Hollis Tisdale or, indeed, of David. But Elizabeth, who had kept the thread of both conversations, said: "You were right. There was a corner's inquest that vindicated Mr. Tisdale at the time."

"But," explained Geraldine courageously, "that was left out of the magazine. Mr. Daniels took it all accurately, just as Mr. Tisdale told it, word for word; but the story was cut terribly. Nothing at all was said of Mr. Weatherbee's part. We couldn't understand that, for with names suppressed, there could be no motive, and he was so clearly the leading character. But magazines

have no conscience. It's anything, with the new ones at least, to catch the public eye, and they stir more melodrama into their truths than the yellow journals do. But Mr. Daniels apologized to Mr. Tisdale, and explained how he wasn't responsible for the editor's note or for printing his name, and he did his best to make it up in his report of the disaster at Cascade tunnel. That story went into the *Press* straight and has been widely copied."

It was in Jimmie's favor that Lucky Banks had read the newspaper story, and also that they had had those hours of intimacy at the west portal. "Well, likely you ain't to blame," the prospector admitted finally, "but there's people who don't know Hollis Tisdale that might believe what the magazine says. And, if I was you, I'd take a little run over to Washington or New York, wherever it is — I'll put up the money — and locate that editor. I'd make him fix it right, my, yes."

"I should be glad to," said Daniels, brightening, "but it's possible those missing pages were lost on the way."

"Well, I'd find out," persisted Banks. "And there's other stories I got wind of when I was in Washington, D. C., and Seattle, too, last time I was down, that ought to be trailed. Maybe it's just politics, but I know for a fact they ain't so."

The irony had gone out of Annabel's face. She had seen Hollis Tisdale but once, yet his coming and going had marked the red-letter day of her life. Her heart championed Banks' fight for him. She turned her dark eyes from him to Daniels.

"It's too bad you tried to tell Hollis Tisdale's story for him," she said. "Even if the magazine had got it all straight, it wouldn't have been the same as getting it first hand. It's like listening to one of those fine singers in a phonograph; you can get the tune and some

of the words, and maybe the voice pretty fair, but you miss the man."

With this she rose. "We are ready to go out to the Orchards, Mr. Bailey. Mr. Banks and I are going to change places with the bride and groom." Then from her silk bag, she brought forth a bunch of keys which she gave to Geraldine. "Nukui is going to stay to clear away," she explained, "and bring our car home. And when you have finished making your plans, and want to go down to see the newspaper office, he will show you a nice short cut through the park."

So again the mayor's chocolate six-passenger car threaded the park and emerged this time on a straight, broad thoroughfare through Hesperides Vale. "This," said Bailey, turning from the town, "is the Alameda. They motor from Wenatchee and beyond to try it. It's a pretty good road, but in a year or two, when these shade trees come into full leaf, it will be something to show."

There were tufts on most of them now and on the young fruit trees that ran in geometrical designs on either side, covering the levels that last year had been overgrown with sage. As these infant orchards dropped behind and the Wenatchee range loomed near, Cerberus detached from the other peaks; but it was no longer a tawny monster on guard; its contour was broken by many terraces, luxuriant with alfalfa and planted with trees.

"Why," exclaimed Mrs. Weatherbee, "there is the gap. Then, this must be the mountain—it reminded me once of a terrible, crouching, wild beast—but it has changed."

"Yes, ma'am," responded Banks, "she's looking tamer now. The peaches have taken right hold, and those fillers of strawberries are hurrying on the green. But

you give 'em three years or maybe four, and take 'em in blossom time,—my, you won't know this old mountain then."

A drive, cross-cutting the bold front, led to the level beneath the summit, where rose the white walls and green gables of Annabel's home, but they rounded the mountain into the smaller vale. "This," said the mayor, with culminating pride, "is Weatherbee Orchards. It shows what money, in the right hands, can do."

A soft breeze came down over the ridge as they ascended; the flume, that followed the contour of the roadway, gurgled pleasantly. Everywhere along the spillways alfalfa spread thriftily, or strawberry plants sent out new tendrils. All growing things were more advanced in that walled pocket than in the outer vale; the arid gulf had become a vast greenhouse. Cerberus no longer menaced. Even the habitation of the goat-woman, that had been the central distraction of the melancholy picture, was obliterated. In all that charming landscape there was no discordant note to break the harmony.

The car doubled the curve at the top of the bench and ran smoothly between breadths of green lawn, bordered by nodding narcissus, towards the house, which was long and low, with a tiled roof and cream-colored walls that enclosed a patio. A silence fell over the company. As they alighted, every one waited, looking expectantly at Beatriz Weatherbee. The music of a fountain fluted from the court, and she went forward, listening. Her face was no longer inscrutable; it shone with a kind of inner illumination. But when she saw the slender column of spray and the sparkling basin, with a few semi-tropical plants grouped on the curb, a cactus, a feathery palm in a quaint stone pot, she turned, and her eyes sought Elizabeth's. "It is all like the old hacienda where grandfather was born, and mother, and"—her voice broke—"Only

that had adobe walls," she finished. "It is like — coming home."

"It is simply marvelous," replied Elizabeth, and she added abruptly, looking at the prospector: "Mr. Banks, you are a problem beyond me."

"It looks all right, doesn't it?" the little man beamed. "Likely it would about suit Dave. And I was able to stand the investment. My, yes, now your brother has bought out the Annabel, what I spent wouldn't cut any figure. But," and his glance moved to the woman who had profited by the venture, "I'll likely get my money back."

Afterwards, when the party had inspected the reservoirs and upper flumes, Beatriz found herself returning to the bench with Lucky Banks. It was almost sunset, and the far Chelan peaks were touched with Alpine fire; below them an amethyst mist filtered over the transformed vale. They had been discussing the architecture of the building.

"I had often gone over the map of the project with David," she said, "but he must have drawn the plans of the house later, in Alaska. It was a complete surprise. I wonder he remembered the old hacienda so accurately; he was there only once — when we were on our wedding journey."

"There were a few measurements that had to be looked up," admitted Banks; "but I took a little run around into lower California last winter, on my way home from Washington, D. C."

"You were there? You troubled to go all the way to the old rancheria for details?"

"Yes, ma'am. It was a mighty good grazing country down there, but the people who bought the place were making their money out of one of those fine hotels; it was put up alongside a bunch of hot springs. Nobody

but a couple of Mexicans was living in the old house. It was in bad shape."

"I know. I know. If I had been a man, it would have been different. I should have restored it; I should have worked, fought to buy back every acre. But you saw old Jacinta and Carlos? It was recorded in the title they should be allowed to stay there and have the use of the old home garden as long as they lived. My mother insisted on that."

They had reached the level and walked on by the house towards the solitary pine tree on the rim of the bench. After a moment he said: "Now Dave's project is running in good shape, there isn't much left for me to do, my, no, except see the statue set up in the park."

"I wanted to ask you about that, Mr. Banks; we passed the place on the way to the bungalow. It was beautiful. I presume you have selected a woman's figure — a lovely Ceres or Aphrodite?"

"No, ma'am," responded Banks a little sharply. "It's a full-sized man. Full-sized and some over, what the sculptor who made it calls heroic; and it's a good likeness of Dave Weatherbee."

They had reached the pine tree, and she put out her hand to steady herself on the bole. "I understand," she said slowly. "It was a beautiful — tribute."

"It looks pretty nice," corroborated the prospector. "There was a mighty good photograph of Dave a young fellow on a Yukon steamer gave me once, to go by. He was standing on a low bluff, with his head up, looking off like a young elk, when the boat pulled out, and the camera man snapped him. It was the day we quit the partner lay, and I was going down-stream, and he was starting for the headwaters of the Susitna. Tisdale told me about a man who had done first-class work in New York, and I sent that picture with a check for a starter

on my order. I wrote him the price wasn't cutting any figure with me; what I wanted was the best he could do and to have it delivered by the fifteenth of March. And he did; he had it done on time; and he said it was his best work. It's waiting down in Weatherbee now. Hollis thought likely I better leave it to you whether to have the burying with the statue down in the park, or up here, somewhere, on Dave's own ground."

"Do you mean," she asked, and her voice almost failed, "you have brought — David — home?"

Banks nodded. "It was cold for him wintering up there in the Alaska snow."

"Oh, I know. I've thought about — that. I should have done — as you have — had I been able."

After a moment she said: "What is there I can say to you? I did not know there were such men in the world until I knew you and Hollis Tisdale. Of course you believed, as he did, that I was necessary to round out David's project. That is why, when it was successfully completed, you forfeited the bonus and all the investment. I may never be able to fully refund you but — I shall do my best. And this other — too. Mr. Banks, was that Mr. Tisdale's suggestion? Did he share that — expense — with you?"

"No, ma'am, he let me have that chance when we talked it over. I had to get even with him on the project."

"Even with him on the project?"

"Yes, ma'am. He let me put up the money, but it's got to be paid back out of Dave's half interest in the Aurora mine. And likely, likely, that's what Dave Weatherbee would have wanted done."

CHAPTER XXX

THE JUNIOR DEFENDANT

IT was following a recess during the third afternoon of the trial; a jury had at last been impanelled, the attorney for the prosecution and the leading lawyer for the defense had measured swords, when Stuart Foster, the junior defendant in the "Conspiracy to Defraud the Government," was called to the stand. Frederic Morganstein, the head of the Prince William Development Company, straightened in his seat beside the vacated chair. He was sleekly groomed, and his folded, pinkish white hands suggested a good child's; his blank face assumed an expression of mildly protesting innocence. But the man who stepped from his shadow into the strong light of the south windows was plainly harassed and worn. His boyishness was gone; he seemed to have aged years since that evening in September when he had sailed for Alaska. Tisdale's great heart stirred, then his clear mind began to tally the rapid fire of questions and Foster's replies.

"When were you first connected with the Prince William Development Company, Mr. Foster?"

"In the summer of 1904."

"You were then engaged in the capacity of mining engineer at a fixed salary, were you not?" The prosecuting attorney had a disconcerting manner of arching his brows. His mouth, taken in connection with his strong, square jaw, had the effect of closing on his questions like a trap.

"Yes," Foster answered briefly, "I was to receive two hundred and fifty dollars a month the first year, and its equivalent in the company's stock."

"Did you not, at the same time, turn over to the company your interests in the Chugach Railway and Development Company?"

"Yes," said Foster.

"And was not this railroad built for the purpose of opening certain coal lands in the Matanuska region, in which you held an interest?"

"Yes, I had entered a coal claim of one hundred and sixty acres."

"All the law allowed to an individual; but, Mr. Foster, did you not induce others, as many as thirty persons, to locate adjoining claims with the idea that the entire group would come under one control?"

Foster colored. "It was necessary to co-operate," he said slowly, "in order to meet the enormous expense of development and transportation. We wished to build a narrow-gauge road—it was then in course of construction—but the survey was through the Chugach Mountains, the most rugged in North America. The cost of moving material, after it was shipped from the States, was almost prohibitive; ordinary labor commanded higher wages than are paid skilled mechanics here in Seattle."

"Mr. Foster, were not those coal claims located with a purpose to dispose of them in a group at a profit?"

"No, sir. I have told you on account of the great expense of development it was necessary to work together; it was also necessary that as many claims as possible should be taken."

The prosecution, nodding affirmatively, looked at the jury. "The more cunning and subtle the disguise," he said, "the more sure we may be of the evasion of the law. So, Mr. Foster, you promoted an interest in the fields,

selected claims for men who never saw them; used their power of attorney?"

"Yes. That was in accordance with the law then in force. We paid for our coal claims, the required ten dollars an acre. The land office accepted our money, eighty thousand dollars. Then the President suspended the law, and we never received our patents. About that time the Chugach forest reserve was made, and we were hampered by all sorts of impossible conditions. Some of us were financially ruined. One of the first locators spent one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, his whole fortune, in development. He opened his mine and had several tons of coal carried by packers through the mountains to the coast, to be shipped to Seattle, to be tested on one of the Government cruisers. The report was so favorable it encouraged the rest of us to stay with the venture."

"Mr. Foster," the attorney's voice took a higher, more aggressive pitch, "were not many of those claims entered under names furnished by an agent of the Morganstein interests?"

"Well, yes." Foster threw his head with something of his old boyish defiance. He was losing patience and skill. "Mr. Morganstein himself made a filing, and his father. That is the reason all our holdings are now classed as the Morganstein group."

"And," pursued the lawyer, "their entries were incidental with the consolidation of your company with the Prince William Development Company?"

Foster flushed hotly. "The Prince William Development Company was in need of coal; no enterprise can be carried on without it in Alaska. And the consolidation brought necessary capital to us; without it, our railroad was bankrupt. It meant inestimable benefit to the country, to every prospector, miner, homesteader, who must

waste nerve-breaking weeks packing his outfit through those bleak mountains in order to reach the interior. But, before forty miles of track was completed, the executive withdrew all Alaska coal lands from entry, and we discontinued construction, pending an Act of Congress to allow our patents. The material carried in there at so great a cost is lying there still, rotting away."

"Gentlemen, is it not all clear to you?" The prosecuting attorney flashed a glance of triumph over the jury. "Do you not see in this Prince William Development Company the long arm of the octopus that is strangling Alaska? That has reached out its tentacles everywhere, for gold here, copper there; for oil, coal, timber, anything in sight? That, but for the foresight of the executive and Gifford Pinchot, would possess most of Alaska to-day?"

The men on the jury looked thoughtful but not altogether convinced. One glanced at his neighbor with a covert smile. This man, whom the Government had selected to prosecute the coal fraud cases was undeniably able, often brilliant, but his statements showed he had brought his ideas of Alaska from the Atlantic coast; to him, standing in the Seattle courtroom, our outlying possession was still as remote. As his glance moved to the ranks of outside listeners, who overflowed the seats and crowded the aisles to the doors, he must have been conscious that the sentiment he had expressed was at least unpopular in the northwest. Faces that had been merely interested or curious grew suddenly lowering. The atmosphere of the place seemed surcharged.

The following morning Morganstein took the stand. Though in small matters that touched his personal comfort he was arrogantly irritable, under the cross-examination that assailed his commercial methods he proved suave and non-committal. As the day passed, the prosecutor's

insinuations grew more open and vindictive. Judge Feversham sprang to his feet repeatedly to challenge his accusations, and twice the Court calmed the Government's attorney with a reprimand. The atmosphere of the room seemed to seethe hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. Finally, during the afternoon session, Foster was recalled.

Through it all Tisdale waited, listening to everything, separating, weighing each point presented. It was beginning to look serious for Foster. Clearly, in his determination to win his suit, the prosecution was losing sight of the simple justice the Government desired. And a man less dramatic, less choleric, with less of a reputation for political intrigue than Miles Feversham might better have defended Stuart Foster. Foster was so frank, so honest, so eager to make the Alaska situation understood. And it was not an isolated case; there were hundreds of young men, who, like him, had cast their fortunes with that new and growing country, to find themselves, after years of hardship and privation of which the outside world had no conception, bound hand and foot in an intricate tangle of the Government's red tape.

The evening of the fourth day the attorney for the prosecution surprised Tisdale at his rooms. "Thank you," he said, when Hollis offered his armchair, "but those windows open to the four winds of heaven are a little imprudent to a man who lives by his voice. Pretty, though, isn't it?" He paused a moment to look down on the harbor lights and the chains of electric globes stretching off to Queen Anne hill and far and away to Magnolia bluff, then seated himself between the screen and the table that held the shaded reading lamp. "Has it occurred to you, Mr. Tisdale," he asked, "that a question may be raised as to the legality of your testimony in these coal cases?"

"No." Hollis remained standing. He looked at his

visitor in surprise. "Please make that clear, Mr. Bromley," he said.

The attorney smiled. "This is a trial case," he began. "A dozen others hinge on it. I was warned to be prepared for anything; so, when my attention was called to that article in *Sampson's Magazine*, my suspicions were instantly awake. It looked much like blackmail and, in connection with another story I heard in circulation at Washington, seemed a systematic preparation to attack the Government's witness. Possibly you do not know it was Mr. Jerold, your legal adviser and my personal friend, who put me in touch with the magazine. You had wired him to find out certain facts, but he was unable to go to New York at the time and, knowing I was there for the week, he got into communication with me by telephone and asked me to look the matter up. The publishers, fearing a libel suit which would ruin them, were very obliging. They allowed me to see not only the original manuscript, but Mrs. Feversham's letter, which I took the trouble to copy."

"Mrs. Feversham's letter?" Tisdale exclaimed. "Do you mean it was Mrs. Feversham who was responsible for that story?"

"As it was published, yes. But Daniels was not a pen name. There really was such a writer—I have taken the trouble to find that out since I arrived in Seattle. He was on the staff of the *Press* and wrote a very creditable account of the catastrophe on the Great Northern railroad, in which glowing tribute was given you. But since then, and this is what makes the situation so questionable, he has left the paper and dropped completely out of sight."

Tisdale drew forward his chair and settled himself comfortably. "There is no need to worry about Jimmie Daniels," he said; "he is all right. I saw him at Cascade tunnel; he told me he was about to be married and go to

the Wenatchee country to conduct a paper of his own. It's too bad there wasn't another reporter up there to tell about him. He worked like a Trojan, and it was a place to try a man's mettle. Afterwards, before he left, he came to me and introduced himself. He had been aboard the yacht that day I told the story. He had taken it down in his notebook behind an awning. He told me one of the ladies on board — he did not mention her name — who read his copy later, offered to dispose of it for him."

"So," said the lawyer slowly, "you did tell the story; there was a papoose; the unfortunate incident really occurred."

"Yes," responded Tisdale, "it happened in a canyon of those mountains across the Sound. You can barely make out their outline to-night; but watch for them at sunrise; it's worth waiting for." Then, after a moment, he said, "I told the story to show the caliber of Weatherbee, the man who put himself in my place when the Indians came to our camp, looking for me; but, in editing, all mention of him was cut out. Daniels couldn't understand that. He said the manuscript was long, but if it was necessary to abridge in making up the magazine, why had they thrown out the finest part of the story?"

"Let me see," said the attorney thoughtfully, "wasn't Weatherbee the name of the man you grub-staked in Alaska, and who discovered the Aurora mine?"

Tisdale bowed, then added, with the vibration playing softly in his voice: "And the name of the bravest and noblest man that ever fought the unequal fight of the north."

"Which proves the story was not published to exploit a hero," commented Bromley. "But now," he went on brusquely, "we have arrived at the other story. Do you know, Mr. Tisdale, it is being said in Washington, and, too, I have heard it here in Seattle, that though your own

half interest in the Aurora mine, acquired through the grub-stake you furnished Weatherbee, will make you a millionaire at least, you are withholding the widow's share."

This time Tisdale did not express surprise. "I have had that suggested to me," he answered quietly. "But the stories of the Aurora are very much inflated. It is a comparatively new mine, and though it promises to be one of the great discoveries, the expense of operating so far has exceeded the output. Heavy machinery has been transported and installed, and Mrs. Weatherbee could not have met any part of these payments. In all probability she would have immediately disposed of an interest at a small price and so handicapped me with a partner with his own ideas of development. David Weatherbee paid for the Aurora with his life, and I have pledged myself to carry out his plans. But, Mr. Bromley, do not trouble about that last half interest. I bought it: the transfer was regularly recorded; Mr. Jerold has assured me it is legally mine."

"I know what Mr. Jerold thinks," replied the attorney. "It nettled him to hear me repeat that story. 'Why, it's incredible,' " he said. "'There are documents I drew up last fall that refute it completely.' " Mr. Bromley paused, then went on slowly: "Last fall you were in a hospital, Mr. Tisdale, beginning a long, all but hopeless fight for your life, and it was natural you should have called in Mr. Jerold to settle your affairs. I inferred from his remark that you had remembered Mrs. Weatherbee, at least, in your will." He halted again, then added still more deliberately: "If I am right, I should like to be prepared, in case of emergency, to read such a clause in court."

Tisdale was silent. He rose and turned to the west windows, where he stood looking down on the harbor lights.

"Am I right?" persisted the attorney.

Hollis thrust his hands into his pockets and swung around. He stood with his chin lowered, looking at the lawyer with his upward glance from under slightly frowning brows. "Well," he said at last, "suppose you are. And suppose I refuse to have my private papers read in open court?"

"In that case," answered Mr. Bromley, rising, "I must telegraph to Washington for one of the Alaska coal commission to take your place. I am sorry. You were named to me at the beginning as a man who knew more about Alaska coal, and, in fact, the whole Alaska situation, than any other employee of the Government."

Still, having said this, Mr. Bromley did not seem in any hurry to go, but stood holding his hat and waiting for a word from Tisdale to redeem the situation. At last it came. "Is there no other way," he asked, "than to drag my private affairs into court?"

The attorney gravely shook his head. "You never can tell what a jury will do," he said. "Less than a prejudice against a witness has swung a decision sometimes."

Hollis said no more. He went over to his safe and selected a package containing three documents held together by a rubber band. After a hesitating moment, he drew out one, which he returned to its place. The others he brought to the attorney, who carried them to the reading lamp to scan. One was a deed to the last half interest in the Aurora, the one which Weatherbee had had recorded, and the remaining paper was, as Mr. Bromley conjectured, Tisdale's will; but it contained a somewhat disconcerting surprise. However, the lawyer seated himself and, spreading the paper open on the table, copied this clause.

. . . "The Aurora mine, lying in an unsurveyed region of Alaska, accessible from Seward by way of Rainy Pass, and from the Iditarod district north by east, I bequeath to Beatriz Silva Gonzales Weatherbee, to be held for her in

trust by Stuart Emory Foster for a period of five years, or until development, according to David Weatherbee's plans, shall have been fully carried out. The profits, above the cost of all improvements and all operating expenses — which shall include a superintendent's salary of four thousand dollars a year to said Stuart Emory Foster — to be paid in semi-annual dividends to said Beatriz Silva Gonzales Weatherbee."

"Stuart Emory Foster," repeated the lawyer meditatively, putting away his fountain pen. "You evidently have considerable confidence in his engineering skill, Mr. Tisdale."

"Yes." His voice mellowed, but he regarded the attorney with the upward, watchful look. "I have confidence in Stuart Emory Foster in every way. He is not only one of the most capable, reliable mining engineers, but also one of the most respected and most trusted men in the north."

There was a silence, during which Mr. Bromley thoughtfully folded his copy and placed it in his pocket-book. "Thank you, Mr. Tisdale," he said finally, and rose once more. "You may not be called for several days but when you are, it is advisable that you have the original documents at hand. Good night."

CHAPTER XXXI

TISDALE OF ALASKA — AND WASHINGTON, D. C.

IT was evident, after his interview with Hollis Tisdale, that Mr. Bromley was in no hurry to precipitate the side issue for which he had prepared. Every one who had taken coal land in the Morganstein group had been on the witness stand, and many more who had not filed claims had given testimony, yet the prosecution held him in reserve. Then came a day when Lucky Banks, recalled to tell what he knew about the Chugach trail, made some astonishing statements. He had traveled that route with a partner at the end of a season in the Copper River plateau. They had expected to finish the distance by the new railroad. The little man was brief but graphic. It seemed to have been a running fight with storms, glaciers, and glacial torrents to reach that narrow-gauge track before the first real September blizzard. "But we could have stood it," he concluded in his high key, "my, yes, it wouldn't have amounted to much, if we could have had firewood."

"Did you not know the fallen timber was at your service?" questioned Mr. Bromley. "Provided, of course, you conformed to the laws of the reserve in building your fire and in extinguishing it when you broke camp."

"There wasn't any fallen timber," responded Banks dryly; "and likely we would have took it green, if there had been a tree in sight. It was getting mighty cold, nights, and with the frost in his wet clothes, a man needs a warm supper to hearten him."

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Bromley sharply. "Do you mean you saw no trees? Remember you were in the Chugach forest; or did you lose your way?"

"No, sir. We struck the Chugach Railway just where we aimed to, but a mighty lot of the Chugach reserve is out of timber line. That's why we banked on Foster's new train to hurry us through. But we found she had quit running. The Government had got wind of the scheme and sent a bunch of rules and regulations. First came a heavy tax for operating the road; and next was an order to put spark arresters on all his engines. He only had two first-class ones and a couple of makeshifts to haul his gravel cars; and his sparks would have froze, likely, where they lit, but there he was, tied up on the edge of a fill he had counted on finishing up before his crew went out for the winter, and the nearest spark arrester farther off than Christmas."

A ripple of amusement ran through the crowded room, but little Banks stood waiting frostily. When his glance caught the judge's smile, his eyes scintillated their blue light. "Likely Foster would have sent his order out and had those arresters shipped around Cape Horn from New York," he added. "They'd probably been in time for spring travel; but he opened another bunch of mail and found there wouldn't be any more sparks. Washington, D. C., had shut down his coal mine."

Mr. Bromley had no further questions to ask. He seemed preoccupied and passed the recess that followed the prospector's testimony in pacing the corridor. Lucky Banks had been suggested as an intelligent and honest fellow on whom the Government might rely; but his statements failed to dovetail with his knowledge of Alaska and the case, and after the intermission Tisdale was called.

The moment he was sworn, Miles Feversham was on his

feet. He held in his hand a magazine, in which during the recess, he had been engrossed, and his forefinger kept the place.

"I object to this witness," he said sonorously and waited while a stir, like a gust of wind in a wood, swept the courtroom, and the jury straightened, alert. "I object, not because he defrauded the widow of David Weatherbee out of her half interest in the Aurora mine, though, gentlemen, you know this to be an open fact, but for the reason that he is a criminal, self-confessed, who should be serving a prison sentence, and a criminal's testimony is not allowable in a United States court."

Before he finished speaking, or the Court had recovered from the shock, Mr. Bromley had taken a bundle of papers from his pocket and stepped close to the jury box.

"This is an infamous fabrication," he exclaimed. "It was calculated to surprise us, but it finds us prepared. In ten minutes we shall prove it was planned six months ago to defame the character of the Government's witness at this trial. I have here, gentlemen, a copy of the Alaska record showing the transfer of David Weatherbee's interest in the Aurora mine to Hollis Tisdale; it bears the signature of his wife. But this extract from Mr. Tisdale's will, which was drawn shortly after his return from Alaska, last year, and while he was dangerously ill in Washington, proves how far it was from his intention to defraud the widow of David Weatherbee." Here Mr. Bromley read the clause.

Tisdale, standing at ease, with his hand resting on his chair, glanced from the attorney to Foster. No mask covered his transparent face; the dark circles under his fine, expressive eyes betrayed how nearly threadbare his hope was worn. Then, suddenly, in the moment he met Tisdale's look, wonder, swift intelligence, contrition, and the gratitude of his young, sorely tried spirit flashed from

his countenance. To Hollis it became an illuminated scroll.

"As to the main charge," resumed Mr. Bromley, "that is ridiculous. It is based on an unfortunate accident to an Indian child years ago. The distorted yarn was published in a late issue of a sensational magazine. No doubt most of you have read it, since it was widely circulated. Different— isn't it? — from that other story of Mr. Tisdale which came down from Cascade tunnel. Gentlemen, I have the letter that was enclosed with the manuscript that was submitted to *Sampson's Magazine*. It was not written by the author, James Daniels, but by a lady, who had offered to dispose of the material for him, and who, without his knowledge, substituted a revised copy."

Miles Feversham had subsided, dumbfounded, into his chair; his self-sufficiency had deserted him; for a moment the purple color surged in his face; his chagrin overwhelmed him. But Marcia, seated in the front row outside the bar, showed no confusion. Her brilliant, compelling eyes were on her husband. It was as though she wished to reinforce him, and at the same time convey some urgent, vital thought. He glanced around and, reading the look, started again to his feet. He began to retract his denunciation. It was evident he had been misinformed; he offered his apologies to the witness and asked that the case be resumed. But the prosecuting attorney, disregarding him, continued to explain. "In the Daniels' manuscript, gentlemen, a coroner's inquest exonerated the man who was responsible for the death of the papoose; this the magazine suppressed. I am able to offer in evidence James Daniels' affidavit."

Then, while the jury gathered these varying ideas in fragments, Lucky Banks' treble rose. "Let's hear what the lady wrote." And some one at the back of the courtroom said in a deep voice: "Read the lady's letter."

It seemed inevitable. Mr. Bromley had separated a letter from the bundle of papers. Involuntarily Marcia started up. But the knocking of the gavel, sounding smartly, insistently, above the confusion, brought unexpected deliverance.

"It is unnecessary to further delay this Court with this issue," announced the judge. "The case before the jury already has dragged through nearly four weeks, and it should be conducted as expeditiously as possible to a close. Mr. Bromley, the witness is sustained."

Marcia settled back in her place; Miles Feversham, like a man who has slipped on the edge of a chasm, sat a moment longer, gripping the arms of his chair; then his shifting look caught Frederic's wide-eyed gaze of uncomprehending innocence, and he weakly smiled.

"Mr. Tisdale," began the prosecution, putting aside his papers and endeavoring to focus his mind again on the case, "you have spent some years with the Alaska division of the Geological Survey?"

"Every open season and some of the winters for a period of ten years, with the exception of three which I also spent in Alaska."

"And you are particularly familiar with the locality included in the Chugach forest reserve, I understand, Mr. Tisdale. Tell us a little about it. It contains vast reaches of valuable and marketable timber, does it not?"

The genial lines crinkled lightly in Tisdale's face. "The Chugach forest contains some marketable timber on the lower Pacific slopes," he replied, "where there is excessive precipitation and the influence of the warm Japan current, but along the streams on the other side of the divide there are only occasional growths of scrubby spruce, hardly suitable for telegraph poles or even railroad ties." He paused an instant then went on mellowly: "Gifford Pinchot was thousands of miles away; he never had seen

Alaska, when he suggested that the Executive set aside the Chugach forest reserve. No doubt he believed there was valuable timber on those lofty peaks and glaciers, but I don't know how he first heard of a Chugach forest, unless " — he halted again and looked at the jury, while the humor deepened in his voice — "those Pennsylvania contractors, who were shipping coal around Cape Horn to supply the Pacific navy, took the chance of there being trees in those mountains and interested the Government in saving the timber — to conserve the coal."

A ripple of laughter passed over the jury and on through the courtroom. Even the presiding judge smiled, and Mr. Bromley hurried to say: "Tell us something about that Alaska coal, Mr. Tisdale. You have found vast bodies — have you not? — of a very high grade; to compare favorably with Pennsylvania coal."

"The Geodetic Survey estimates there are over eight millions of acres of coal land already known in Alaska," replied Hollis statistically. "More than is contained in all Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio combined. It is of all grades. The Bonnifield near Fairbanks, far in the interior, is the largest field yet discovered, and in one hundred and twenty-two square miles of it that have been surveyed, there are about ten billions of tons. Cross sections show veins two hundred and thirty-one feet thick. This coal is lignite."

"How about the Matanuska fields?" asked Mr. Bromley.

"The Matanuska cover sixty-five thousand acres; the coal is a high grade bituminous, fit for steam and coking purposes. There are also some veins of anthracite. I consider the Matanuska the best and most important coal yet discovered in Alaska, and with the Bering coal, which is similar though more broken, these fields should supply the United States for centuries to come."

Mr. Bromley looked at the jury. His smile said:

"You heard that, gentlemen?" Then, his glance returning to the witness:

"Why the most important?" he asked.

"Because all development, all industry, in the north depends on the opening up of such a body of coal. And these fields are the most accessible to the coast. A few hundreds of miles of railroad, the extension of one or two of the embryo lines on which construction has been suspended, would make the coal available on Prince William Sound. Used by the Pacific Navy, it would save the Government a million dollars a year on transportation."

The prosecuting attorney looked at the jury again in triumph. "And that, gentlemen, is why the Prince William Development Company was so ready to finance one of those embryo railroads; why those Matanuska coal claims were located by the syndicate's stenographers, bookkeepers, any employee down here in their Seattle offices. Mr. Tisdale, if those patents had been allowed and the claims had been turned over to the company, would it not have given the Morganstein interests a monopoly on Alaska coal?"

Tisdale paused a thoughtful moment. "No, at least only temporarily, if at all. Out of those eight millions of acres of coal land already discovered in Alaska, not more than thirty-two thousand acres have been staked — only one claim, an old and small mine on the coast, has been allowed." His glance moved slowly over the jury, from face to face, and he went on evenly: "You can't expect capital to invest without some inducement. The Northern Pacific, the first trans-continental railroad in the United States, received enormous land grants along the right of way; but the Prince William Development Company, which intends ultimately to bridge distances as vast, to tap the unknown resources of the Alaska interior,

has not asked for concessions, beyond the privilege to develop such properties as it may have acquired by location and purchase. Surely the benefit that railroad would be in opening the country to settlement and in the saving of human life, should more than compensate for those few hundreds of acres of the Government's coal."

"Mr. Tisdale," said the attorney sharply, "that, in an employee of the Government, is a strange point of view."

Tisdale's hands sought his pockets; he returned Mr. Bromley's look with his steady, upward gaze from under slightly frowning brows. "The perspective changes at close range," he said. "The Government knows less about its great possession of Alaska than England knew about her American colonies, one hundred and fifty years ago. The United States had owned Alaska seventeen years before any form of government was established there; more than thirty before a criminal code was provided, and thirty-three years before she was given a suitable code of civil laws. Now, to-day, there are no laws operative in Alaska under which title may be acquired to coal land. Alaska has yielded hundreds of millions of dollars from her placers, her fisheries, and furs, but the only thing the Government ever did for Alaska was to import reindeer for the use of the Esquimos."

Another ripple of laughter passed through the courtroom; even the judge on the bench smiled. But Mr. Bromley's face was a study. He began to fear the effect of Tisdale's astonishing statements on the jury, while at the same time he was impelled to listen. In the moment he hesitated over a question, Hollis lifted his head and said mellowly: "The sins of Congress have not been in commission but in omission. They are under the impression, far away there in Washington, that Alaska is too bleak, too barren for permanent settlement; that the white population is a floating one, made up chiefly of freebooters and

outlaws. But we know the foundations of an empire have been laid there; that, allowed the use of the fuel Nature has so bountifully stored there and granted a fair measure of encouragement to transportation, those great inland tundras would be as populous as Sweden; as progressive as Germany." His glance moved to the jury; all the nobility, the fineness, the large humanity of the man was expressed in that moment in his face; a subdued emotion pervaded his voice. "We know the men who forged a way through that mighty bulwark of mountains to the interior were brave, resourceful, determined — they had to be — but, too, they saw a broad horizon; they had patriotism; if there are any Americans left who have inherited a spark of the old Puritan spirit, they are the ones who have cast their fortunes with Alaska."

He paused again briefly, and his eyes rested on Foster. "Do you know?" he resumed, and his glance returned to the prosecuting attorney, "when I came out last season, I saw a ship at the terminus of the new Copper River and Northwestern Railroad discharging Australian coal. This with the great Bering fields lying at their side door! The people of Cordova wanted to see that road finished; the life of their young seaport depended on it — but — that night they threw the whole of that cargo of foreign coal into the waters of Prince William Sound. It is referred to, now, as the 'Cordova tea-party.'"

In the silence that held the courtroom, Tisdale stood still regarding the lawyer. His expression was most engaging, a hint of humor lurked at the corners of his mouth, yet it seemed to veil a subtle meaning. Then the jury began to laugh quietly, with a kind of seriousness, and again the judge straightened, checking a smile. It was all very disturbing to Mr. Bromley. He had been assured by one high in the administration that he might rely on Tisdale's magnetic personality and practical knowl-

edge as well as his technical information in prosecuting the case; but while he hesitated over the question he wished to ask, Tisdale said mellowly, no doubt to bridge the awkward pause: "The Copper River and Northwestern couldn't mine their coal, and they couldn't import any, so they changed their locomotives to oil burners."

Then Mr. Bromley said abruptly: "This is all very interesting, Mr. Tisdale, but it is the Chugach Railway and not the Copper River Northwestern, that bears on our case. You have been over that route, I believe?"

"Yes." Tisdale's voice quickened. "I used the road-bed going to and from the Matanuska Valley. Also I went over the proposed route once with Mr. Foster and the civil engineers."

"Was it, in your opinion, a bona fide railroad, Mr. Tisdale? Or simply a lure to entice people to make coal locations in order that they might be bought after the patents were issued?"

"It was started in good faith." The steel rang, a warning note, in his voice. "The largest stockholder had spent nearly a hundred thousand dollars in opening his coal claim. He was in need of immediate transportation."

"This was after the Chugach Company consolidated with the Prince William syndicate, Mr. Tisdale?"

"No, sir. It was previous to that time. The Chugach Railway and Development Company had chosen one of the finest harbors in Alaska for a terminus. It was doubly protected from the long Pacific swell by the outer, precipitous shore of Prince William Sound. But their greatest engineering problem met them there at the start. It was necessary to cross a large glacier back of the bay. There was no possible way to build around it; the only solution was a bore under the ice. The building of such a tunnel meant labor and great expense. And it was not a rich company; it was made up principally of small stockholders,

young men, just out of college some of them, who had gone up there with plenty of enthusiasm and courage to invest in the enterprise, but very little money. They did their own assessment work, dug like any coal miners with pick and shovel, cut and carried the timbers to brace their excavations under Mr. Foster's instructions. And when construction commenced on the railroad, they came down to do their stunt at packing over the glacier — grading began from the upper side — and sometimes they cut ties."

"And meantime," said the attorney brusquely, "Mr. Foster, who was responsible I believe, was trying to interest other capital to build the tunnel."

"Yes. And meantime, the Prince William syndicate started a parallel railroad to the interior from the next harbor to the southwestward. It was difficult to interest large capital with competition so close." Tisdale paused; his glance moved from Mr. Bromley to the jury, his voice took its minor note. "Stuart Foster did hold himself responsible to those young fellows. He had known most of them personally in Seattle; they were a picked company for the venture. He had youth and courage himself, in those days, but he knew Alaska — he had been there before and made good. He had their confidence. He was that kind of man; one to inspire trust on sight, anywhere." Hollis paused another instant, while his eyes turned to Foster, and involuntarily, one after the other, the jury followed his look. "It was then," he added, "when other capital failed, the Chugach Company gave up their seaport and consolidated with the Prince William syndicate."

"Thank you, Mr. Tisdale," said the attorney for the prosecution. "That is all."

Miles Feversham had, as Frederic afterward expressed it, "caught his second wind." While he listened attentively to the testimony, he made some sweeping revisions in his notes for the argument which he was to open the

following day. He laughed at, while he congratulated himself, that the Government's star witness, of whom he had been so afraid, should have proved so invaluable to the defense. And when court adjourned, and the trio went down the steps to the street, he assured his brother-in-law there was a chance for him to escape, under Foster's cloak. To Marcia he said jocularly, though still in an undertone: "Snatched like a brand from the burning!" And he added: "My lady, had you consulted me, I should have suggested the April issue. These magazines have a bad habit of arriving too soon."

Frederic, released from the long day's strain, did not take this facetiousness meekly, but Marcia was silent. For once the "brightest Morganstein" felt her eclipse. But while they stood on the curb, waiting for the limousine to draw up, a newsboy called: "All about the Alaska bill! Home Rule for Alaska!"

The special delegate bought a copy, and Marcia drew close to his elbow while they scanned the message together. It was true. The bill, to which they both had devoted their energies that season in Washington, had passed. Feversham folded the paper slowly and met his wife's brilliant glance. It was as though she telegraphed: "Now, the President must name a governor."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE OTHER DOCUMENT

THE argument, which Miles Feversham opened with unusual brilliancy the following morning, was prolonged with varying degrees of heat to the close of another week; then the jury, out less than two hours, brought in their verdict of "Not Guilty."

And that night, for the first time since Tisdale's return, Foster climbed to the eyrie in the Alaska building. "I came up to thank you, Hollis," he began in his straightforward way. "It was breakers ahead when you turned the tide. But," he added after a pause, "what will the President think of your views?"

Tisdale laughed softly. "He heard most of them before I left Washington, and this is what he thinks."

As he spoke, he took a letter from the table which he gave to Foster. It bore the official stamp and was an appointment to that position which Miles Feversham had so confidently hoped, with Marcia's aid, to secure.

"Well, that shows the President's good judgment!" Foster exclaimed and held out his hand. "You are the one man broad enough to fit the place." After a moment he said, "But it is going to leave you little time to devote to your own affairs. How about the Aurora?"

Tisdale did not reply directly. He rose and walked the length of the floor. "That depends," he said and stopped with his hands in his pockets to regard Foster with the upward, appraising look from under knitting brows. "I presume, Stuart, you are through with the syndicate?"

Foster colored. "I put in my resignation as mining engineer of the company shortly after I came out, at the beginning of the year."

"And while you were in the interior," pursued Tisdale, "you were sent to the Aurora to make a report. What did you think of the mine?"

"I thought Frederic Morganstein would be safe in bonding the property if he could interest you in selling; it looked better to me than even Banks' strike in the Iditarod. This season's clean-up should justify Weatherbee."

"You mean in staying on at the risk of his reason and life?"

Foster nodded; a shadow crossed his open face. "I mean everything but — his neglect to make final provision for his wife."

Tisdale frowned. "There is where you make your mistake. Weatherbee persisted as he did, in the face of defeat, for her sake."

Foster laughed mirthlessly. "The proofs are otherwise. Look at things, once, from her side," he broke out. "Think what it means to her to see you realizing, from a few hundred dollars you could easily spare, this big fortune. I know you've been generous, but after all, of what benefit to her is a bequest in your will, when now she has absolutely nothing but that hole in the Columbia desert? Face it, be reasonable; you always have been in every way but this. I don't see how you can be so hard, knowing her now as you do."

Tisdale turned to the window. "I have not been as hard as you think," he said. "But it was necessary, in order to carry out Weatherbee's plans, to — do as I did."

"That's the trouble." Foster rose from his chair and went a few steps nearer Tisdale. "You are the sanest man in the world in every way but one. But you can't

think straight when it comes to Weatherbee. There is where the north got its hold on you. Can't you see it? Look at it through my eyes, or any one's. You did for David Weatherbee what one man in a thousand might have done. And you've interested Lucky Banks in that reclamation project; you've gone on yourself with his developments at the Aurora. But there's one thing you've lost sight of — justice to Beatriz Weatherbee. You've done your best for him, but he is dead. Hollis, old man, I tell you he is dead. And she is living. You have sent her, the proudest, sweetest woman on God's earth, to brave out her life in that sage-brush wilderness. Can't you see you owe something to her?"

Tisdale did not reply. But presently he went over to his safe and took out the two documents that were fastened together. This time it was the will he returned to its place; the other paper he brought to Foster. "I am going to apologize for my estimate of Mrs. Weatherbee the night you sailed north," he said. "My judgment then, before I had seen her, was unfair; you were right. But I could hardly have done differently in any case. There was danger that she would dispose of a half interest in the Aurora at once, at any low price Frederic Morganstein might name. And you know the syndicate's methods. I did not want a Morganstein partnership. But, later, at the time I had my will drawn, I saw this way."

Foster took the document, but he did not read it immediately; he stood looking at Tisdale. "So you too were afraid of him. But I knew nothing about Lucky Banks' option. It worried me, those endless nights up there in the Iditarod, to think that in her extremity she might marry Frederic Morganstein. There was a debt that pressed her. Did you know about that?"

"Yes. She called it a 'debt of honor.'"

"And you believed, as I did, that it was a direct loan

to cover personal expenses. After I came home, I found out she borrowed the money originally of Miss Morganstein, to endow a bed in the children's hospital. Think of it! And Mrs. Feversham, who took it off her sister's hands, transferred the note to Morganstein."

Tisdale did not say anything, but his rugged face worked a little, and he turned again to look out into the night. Foster moved nearer the reading-lamp and unfolded the document. It was a deed conveying, for a consideration of one dollar, a half interest in the Aurora mine to Beatriz Silva Gonzales Weatherbee; provided said half interest be not sold, or parceled, or in any way disposed of for a period of five years. Her share of the profits above operating expenses was to be paid in semi-annual dividends, and, as in the will, Stuart Emory Foster was named as trustee.

Foster folded the document slowly. His glance moved to Tisdale, and his eyes played every swift change from contrition to gratitude. Hollis turned. "I want you to take the management of the whole mine," he said mellowly. "At a salary of five thousand a year to start with. And as soon as you wish, you may deliver this deed."

Foster's lips trembled a little. "You've made a mistake," he said unsteadily. Then: "Why don't you take it to her yourself, Hollis?" he asked.

Tisdale was silent. He turned back to the window, and after an interval, Foster went over and stood beside him, looking down on the harbor lights. His arm went up around Tisdale's shoulder as he said: "If Weatherbee could know everything now; if he had loved her, put her first always, as you believe, do you think he would be any happier to see her punished like this?"

Still Tisdale was silent. Then Foster's arm fell, and he said desperately: "Can't you see, Hollis? Weatherbee was greater than either of us. I grant that. But the

one thing in the world you are so sure he most desired — the lack of which wrecked his life — the one thing I have tried for the hardest and missed — has fallen to you. Go and ask her to sail to Alaska with you. You'll need her up there to carry the honors for you. You prize her, you love her,— you know you do."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CALF-BOUND NOTEBOOK

THE statue was great. So Tisdale told Lucky Banks, that day the prospector met him at the station and they motored around through the park. The sculptor himself had said he must send people to Weatherbee when they wanted to see his best work. It was plain his subject had dominated him. He had achieved with the freedom of pose the suggestion of decision and power that had been characteristic of David Weatherbee. Quick intelligence spoke in the face, yet the eyes held their expression of seeing a far horizon. To Hollis, coming suddenly, as he did, upon the bronze figure in the Wenatchee sunshine, it seemed to warm with a latent consciousness. He felt poignantly a sense of David's personality, as he had known him at the crowning period of his life.

"It suits me," responded Banks. "My, yes, it's about as good a likeness as we can get of Dave." He put on his hat, which involuntarily he had removed, and started the car on around the curve. "But it's a mighty lot like you. It crops out most in the eyes, seeing things off somewheres, clear out of sight, and the way you carry your size. You was a team."

"I am sorry I missed those services," said Tisdale. "I meant to be here."

Banks nodded. "But it all went off fine. She agreed with me it was the best place. If I was to go back to Alaska, and she was off somewheres on a trip, it would be sure to get taken care of here in the park; and, after-

wards, when neither of us can come around to keep things in shape any more. And I told her how the ranchers up and down the valley would get to feeling acquainted and friendly with Dave, seeing his statue when they was in town; and how the fruit-buyers and the pickers, and maybe the tourists, coming and going, would remember about him and tell everybody they knew; and how the school children would ask questions about the statue, thinking he was in the same class with Lincoln and Washington, and be always telling how he was the first man that looked ahead and saw what water in this valley could do."

"You were right, Johnny. The memory of him will live and grow with this town when the rest of us are forgotten."

They had turned from the park and went speeding up between the rows of new poplars along the Alameda, and the prospector's eyes moved over the reclaimed vale, where acres on acres of young fruit trees in cultivated squares crowded out the insistent sage. "And this town for a fact is bound to grow," he said.

Then at last, when Cerberus loomed near, and they entered the gap, the little man's big heart rose and his bleak face glowed, under Tisdale's expressions of wonder and approbation at the advance the vineyards and orchards had made, so soon after the consummation of the project. Fillers of alfalfa stretched along the spillways from the main canal like a green carpet; strawberry plants were blossoming; grapes reached out pale tendrils and many leaves. But, at the top of the pocket, where the road began to lift gently in a double curve across the front of the bench, Hollis dismissed Banks and his red car and walked the rest of the way. On the rim of the level, near the solitary pine tree, he stopped to look down on the transformed vale, and suddenly, once more he seemed to feel David's presence. It was as though he stood beside him

and saw all this awakening, this responding of the desert to his project. Almost it compensated — for those four days.

Almost! Tisdale drew his hand across his eyes and turned to follow the drive between the rows of nodding narcissus. The irony of it! That Weatherbee should have lived to find the Aurora; that, with many times the needed capital in sight, he should have lost. The perfume of the flowers filled the warm atmosphere; the music of running water was everywhere. As he left the side of the flume, the silver note of the fountain came to him from the patio, then, like a mirage between him and the low Spanish building, rose that miniature house he had found in the Alaska wilderness, with the small snow figure before it, holding a bundle in her arms.

The vision passed. But that image with the bundle was the one unfinished problem in the project he had come to solve.

He entered the court and saw on his right an open door and, across the wide room, Beatriz Weatherbee. She was seated at a quaint secretary on which were several bundles of papers, and the familiar box that had contained David's letters and watch. At the moment Tisdale discovered her, she was absorbed in a photograph she held in her hands, but at the sound of his step in the patio she turned and rose to meet him. Her face was radiant, yet she looked at him through arrested tears.

"I am sorry if I startled you," he said conventionally. "Banks brought me from the station, but he left me to walk up the bench."

"I should have seen the red car down the gap had I been at the window," she replied, "but I was busy putting away papers. Freight has been moving slowly over the Great Northern, and my secretary arrived only to-day. It bore the trip very well, considering its age. It belonged

to my great-grandfather, Don Silva Gonzales. He brought it from Spain, but Elizabeth says it might have been made for this room. She is walking somewhere in the direction of the spring."

While she spoke, she touched her cheeks and eyes swiftly with her handkerchief and led the way to some chairs between the secretary and the great window that overlooked the vale. Tisdale did not look at her directly; he wished to give her time to cover the emotion he had surprised.

"I should say the room was built for Don Silva's desk," he amended. "And — do you know? — this view reminds me of a little picture of Granada, a water-color of my mother's, that hung in my room when I was a boy. But this pocket has changed some since we first saw it; your dragon's teeth are drawn."

"Isn't it marvelous how the expression of the whole mountain has altered?" she responded. "There, at the end of the pines, that looked like a bristling mane, the green gables of Mrs. Banks' home have changed the contour. And the Chelan peaks are showing now beyond it. That day the farther ones were obscured. But we watched the rain tramp up Hesperides Vale, you remember, and swing off unexpectedly to the near summits. There was a rainbow, and I said that perhaps somewhere in this valley I should find my pot of gold."

"I remember. And I shouldn't be surprised if you do."

"Do you think I do not know I have already?" she asked. "Do you think I have no appreciation, no gratitude? Why, even had I been too dull to see it, Elizabeth would have told me that this house alone, to say nothing of the project, must have cost a good deal of money; and that, no matter how deeply Mr. Banks may have felt his obligation to David, it was not in reason he should have allowed everything to revert to me. But I told him I should consider the investment as a loan, and now, since

he has let me know the truth"—her voice fluctuated softly—"I shall make it a debt of honor just the same. Sometime—I shall repay you."

It was very clear to Tisdale that though she saw the property had so greatly increased in value, and that the reclamation movement in the outer vale made the tract readily salable, she no longer considered placing it on the market. "I thought Banks showed you a way easily to cancel that loan," he began. But meeting her look, he paused; his glance returned to the window while he felt in his pocket for that deed Foster had refused to bring. It was going to be more difficult than he had foreseen to offer it to her. "Madam," and compelling his eyes to brave hers, he slightly frowned, "your share in the Aurora mine should pay you enough in dividends the next season or two to refund all that has been expended on this project."

"My share in the Aurora mine?" she repeated. "But I see, I see. You have been maligned into giving me the interest David conveyed to you. Oh, Mr. Banks told me about that. How you were attacked at the trial; the use that was made of that Indian story in the magazine; that monstrous editorial note."

Tisdale smiled. "That had nothing to do with it. This deed was drawn last year as soon as I reached Washington. David knew the value of the Aurora. That is the reason he risked another winter there, in the face of—all—that threatened him. And when he felt the fight was going against him, he turned his interest over to me, not only as security on the small loan I advanced to him, but because I was his partner, and he could trust me to finish his development work and put the mine on a paying basis. That is accomplished. There is no reason now that I should not transfer his share back to you."

He rose to give her the deed, and she took it with reluctance and glanced it over. "I think it is arranged

about as David would have wished," he added. "He had confidence in Foster."

She looked up. "Mr. Foster knows how I regard the matter. I told him I would not accept an interest in the Aurora mine. I said all the gold in Alaska could not compensate you for — what you did. Besides, I do not believe as you do, Mr. Tisdale. I think David meant his share should be finally yours."

Hollis was silent. He stood looking off again over Cerberus to the loftier Chelan peaks. For a moment she sat regarding his broad back; her lip trembled a little, and a tenderness, welling from depths of compassion, brimmed her eyes. "You see I cannot possibly accept it," she said, and rose to return the deed to him.

She had forgotten the photograph, which dropped from her lap, and Tisdale stooped to pick it up. It was lying face upward on the floor, and he saw it was the picture of a child; then involuntarily he stopped to scan it, and it came over him this small face, so beautifully molded, so full of intelligence and charm, was a reproduction of Weatherbee in miniature; yet retouched by a blend of the mother; her eyes under David's level brows. He put the picture in her hand and an unspoken question flashed in the look that met hers.

Since he had not relieved her of the deed, she laid it down on the secretary to take the photograph.

"This is a picture of little Silva," she said. "It would have made a difference about the share in the Aurora if he had lived. He must have been provided for. David would have seen to that."

"There was a child!" His voice rang softly like a vibrant string. "You spoke of him that night you were lost above Scenic Springs, but I thought it was a fancy of delirium. It seemed incredible that David should not have told me if he had a son."

She did not answer directly, but nodded a little and moved back to her chair.

"He was christened Silva Falconer, for my mother's father and mine," she said. "They both were greatly disappointed in not having a son. I am going to tell you about him, only it will be a long story; please be seated. And it would be easier if you would not look at me."

She waited while he settled again in his chair and turned his eyes to the blue mountain tops. She was still able to see his face. "Silva was over six months old when this photograph was taken," she began. "It was lost, with the letter to David that enclosed it, on some terrible Alaska trail. Afterwards, when the mailbag was recovered and the letter was returned to me through the dead-letter office, two years had passed, and our little boy was — gone. You must understand I expected David back that first winter, and when word came that his expedition to the interior had failed, and he had arranged to stay in the north in order to make an early start in the following spring, I did not want to spoil his plans. So I answered as gayly as I could and told him it would give me an opportunity to make a long visit home to California. I went far south to Jacinta and Carlos. They were caretakers at the old hacienda. My mother had managed that, with the people who bought the rancheria and built the hotel and sanitarium. Jacinta had been her nurse and mine. She was very experienced. But Silva was born lame. He could not use his lower limbs. A great specialist, who came to the hotel, said he might possibly recover under treatment, but if he should not in a year or two, certain cords must be cut to allow him to sit in a wheel chair, and in that case I must give up hope he would ever walk. But — the treatment was very painful — Jacinta could not bear to — torture him; I could not afford a trained nurse; so — I did everything. He was the dearest baby; so lovable. He

never was cross, but he used to nestle his cheek in my neck and explain how it hurt and coax me not to. Not in words, but I understood — every sound. And he understood me, I know. ‘You are going to blame me, by and by, if I stop,’ I would say, over and over; ‘you are going to blame me for bringing you into the world.’”

Her voice broke; her breast labored with short, quick breaths, as though she were climbing some sharp ascent. Tisdale did not look at her; his face stirred and settled in grim lines.

“I could not write all this about our baby,” she went on, “and I told myself if the treatment failed it would be soon enough for David to know of Silva when he came home. There was nothing he could do, and to share my anxiety might hamper him in his work. He wrote glowingly of the new placer he had discovered, and that was a relief to me, for I was obliged to ask him to send me a good deal of money,—the specialist’s account had been so large. I believed he would start south when the Alaska season closed, for he had written I might expect him then, with his pockets full of gold dust, and I made my letters entertaining — or tried to — so he need not feel any need to hurry. At last, one morning in the bath, when Silva was five months old, he moved his right limb voluntarily. I shall never forget. It renewed my courage and my faith. At the end of another month he moved the left one, and after that, gradually, full use came to them both. It was then, when the paralysis was mastered, I sent the letter that was lost. At the same time David wrote that he must spend a second winter in Alaska. But before that news reached me, my reaction set in. I was so ill I was carried, unconscious, to the sanitarium. And, while I was there, Silva, who had grown so sturdy and was creeping everywhere, followed his kitten into the garden, and a little later old Jacinta found him in the arroyo. There

was only a little water running but — he had fallen — face down.”

Tisdale rose. Meeting her look, the emotion that was the surface stir of shaken depths swept his face. Then, as though to blot out the recollection, she pressed her fingers to her eyes.

“And David was thousands of miles away,” he said. “You braved that alone, like the soldier you are.”

“When I read David’s letter,” she went on, “he was winter-bound in the interior. A reply could not have reached him until spring. And meantime Elizabeth Morganstein came with her mother to the hotel. We had been friends at boarding-school, and she persuaded me to go north to Seattle with them. Later, after the *Aquila* was launched in the spring, I was invited to join the family on a cruise up the inside passage and across the top of the Pacific to Prince William Sound. It seemed so much easier to tell David everything than to write, so — I only let him know I intended to sail to Valdez with friends and would go on by mail steamer to Seward to visit him. That had been his last post-office address, and I believed he expected to be in that neighborhood when the season opened. But our stay was lengthened at Juneau, where we were entertained by acquaintances of Mrs. Feversham’s, and we spent a long time around Taku glacier and the Muir. I missed my steamer connections, and there was not another boat due within a week. But the weather was delightful, and Mr. Morganstein suggested taking me on in the yacht. Then Mrs. Feversham proposed a side trip along Columbia glacier and into College fiord. It was all very wonderful to me, and inspiring; the salt air had been a restorative from the start. And I saw no reason to hurry the party. David would understand. So, the second mail steamer passed us, and finally, when we reached Seward, David had gone back to the interior. The rest — you know.”

"You mean," said Tisdale slowly, "you heard about Mrs. Barbour."

She bowed affirmatively. The color swept in a wave to her face; her lashes fell.

"Mrs. Feversham heard about it, how David had brought her down from the interior. I saw the cabin he had furnished for her, and she herself, sewing at the window. Her face was beautiful."

There was a silence, then Hollis said: "So you came back on the *Aquila* to Seattle. But you wrote; you explained about the child?"

She shook her head. "I waited to hear from David first. I did not know, then, that the letter with Silva's picture was lost."

Tisdale squared his shoulders, looking off again to the snow-peaks above Cerberus.

"Consider!" She rose with an outward movement of her hands, like one groping in the dark for a closed door. "It was a terrible mistake, but I did not know David as you knew him. My father, who was dying, arranged our marriage. I was very young and practically without money in a big city; there was not another relative in the world who cared what became of me. And, in any case, even had I known the meaning of love and marriage, in that hour,—when I was losing him,—I must have agreed to anything he asked. We had been everything to each other; everything. But I've been a proud woman; sensitive to slight. It was in the blood—both sides. And I had been taught early to cover my feelings. My father had adored my mother; he used to remind me she was patrician to the finger-tips, and that I should not wear my heart on my sleeve if I wished to be like her. And, when I visited my grandfather, Don Silva, in the south, he would say: 'Beatriz, remember the blood of generations of soldiers is bottled in you; carry yourself like the last

Gonzales, with some fortitude.' So — at Seward — I remembered."

Her voice, while she said this, almost failed, but every word reached Tisdale. He felt, without seeing, the something that was appeal yet not appeal, that keyed her whole body and shone like a changing light and shade in her face. "I told myself I would not be sacrificed, effaced," she went on. "It was my individuality against Fate. Since little Silva was dead, my life was my own to shape as I might. I did not hear from David for a long time; he wrote less and less frequently, more briefly every year. He never spoke of the baby, and I believed he must have heard through some friend in California of Silva's death. Nothing was left to tell. He never spoke of his home-coming, and I did not; I dreaded it too much. Whenever the last steamers of the season were due, I nerved myself to look the passenger lists over; and when his name was missing, it was a reprieve. Neither my father nor my grandfather had believed in divorce; in their eyes it was disgrace. It seemed right, for Silva's sake, out of the rich placers David continued to find, he should contribute to my support. So — I lived my life — the best I was able. I had many interests, and always one morning of each week I spent among the children at the hospital where I had endowed the Silva Weatherbee bed."

She paused so long that Tisdale turned. She seemed very tired. The patient lines, fine as a thread, deepened perceptibly at the corners of her mouth. He hurried to save her further explanation. "Foster told me," he said. "It was a beautiful memorial. Sometime I should like to go there with you. I know you met the first expense of that endowment with a loan from Miss Morganstein, which of course you expected to cancel soon, when you had found David at Seward. I understand how, when the note came into her brother's hands, your

only chance to meet it at once was through a sale of this land. And I have thought since I knew this, that evening aboard the *Aquila*, when you risked Don Silva's ruby, it was to make the yearly payment at the hospital."

"Yes, it was. But the option money from Mr. Banks made it possible to meet all my debts. I did not know they were only assumed — by you. Though, looking back, I wonder I failed to see the truth."

With this she turned and took up the photograph which she had laid on the secretary, and while her glance rested on the picture, Tisdale's regarded her face. "So," he said then, "when the lost letter came back to you, you kept it; Weatherbee never knew."

She looked up. "Yes, I kept it. By that time I believed little Silva's coming and going could make little difference to him."

"And you went on believing all you had heard at Seward?"

She bowed again affirmatively. "Until you told me the true story about Mrs. Barbour that night on the mountain road. I know now that once he must have loved me, as you believed. This house, which is built so nearly like the old hacienda where I was born, must have been planned for me. But, afterwards, when he thought I had failed him, when he contrasted me with Mrs. Barbour, her devotion to her husband, it was different."

She laid the photograph down again to draw the tin box forward. The letters were on the desk with David's watch, but there still remained a calf-bound notebook, such as surveyors use in field work. It fitted snugly enough for a false bottom, and she was obliged to reverse the box to remove it, prying slightly with a paper-knife. Tisdale's name was lettered across the cover, and the first pages were written in his clear, fine draughtsman's hand;

then the characters changed to Weatherbee's. She turned to the last ones.

"This is a book you left among some old magazines at David's camp," she explained. "He carried it with him until he discovered the Aurora. He began to use it as a sort of diary. Sometime you will want to read it all, but please read these last notes and this letter now."

She waited a moment, then as he took up the letter and began to unfold it, she turned and went out into the patio.

The letter was from Liliias Barbour. It was friendly, earnest, full of her child and a gentle solicitude for Weatherbee. Hollis read it through twice, slowly. The last paragraph he went over a third time. "You are staying too long in that bleak country,"—so it ran. "Come back to the States, at least for a winter. If you do not, in the spring, Bee and I are going to Alaska to learn the reason. We owe it to you."

The date was the end of August, of the same year David had written that final letter which reached him the following spring at Nome. But the date on the open page of the notebook was the fifteenth of January of that winter, his last at the Aurora mine.

"Last night I dreamed of Beatriz," it began. "I thought I went down to Seward to meet her, and when the steamer came, I saw her standing on the forward deck, waving her hand gaily and smiling just as she did that day I left her at Seattle so long ago. Then, as the ship came alongside the dock, and she walked down the gangway, and I took her hand to kiss her, her face suddenly changed. She was not Beatriz; she was Liliias. My God, if it had been Liliias! Why, she would be here now, she and little Bee, filling this frozen cabin with summer."

The final date was two months later.

"Still snowing," it ran. "Snowing. God, how I want to break away from this hole. Get out somewhere, where men are alive and doing things. Nothing is moving here but the snow and those two black buttes out there. They keep crowding closer through the smother, watching everything I do. I've warned them to keep back. They must, or I'll blow them off the face of the earth. Oh, I'll do it, if it takes all that's left of the dynamite. I won't have them threatening Lilius when she comes. She is coming; she said she would, unless I went out to the States. And I can't go; I haven't heard from Tisdale. I never have told her about those buttes. It's unusual; she might not believe it; she would worry and think, perhaps, I am growing like Barbour. God! Suppose I am. Suppose she should come up here in this wilderness to find me a wreck like him. She must not come. I've got to prevent it. But I've offered my half interest in the Aurora to Tisdale. He will take it. He never failed me yet."

Tisdale closed the book and laid it down. Furrows seamed his face, changing, re-forming, to the inner upheaval. After awhile, he lifted Weatherbee's watch from the desk and mechanically pressed the spring. The lower case opened, but the picture he remembered was not there. In its place was the face of the other child, his namesake, "Bee."

Out in the patio the pool rippled ceaselessly; the fountain threw its silver ribbon of spray, and Beatriz waited, listening, with her eyes turned to the room she had left. At last she heard his step. It was the tread of a man whose decision was made. She sank down on the curb of the basin near one of the palms. Behind her an open door, creaking in the light wind, swung wide, and beyond it the upper flume stretched back to the natural reservoir where she had been imprisoned by the fallen pine tree.

His glance, as he crossed the court, moved from her through this door and back to her face.

"You were right," he said. "But it would have been different if David had known about his child. His great heart was starved."

She was silent. Her glance fell to the fountain. A ray of sunshine slanting across it formed a rainbow.

"But my mistake was greater than yours," he went on, and his voice struck its minor chord; "I have no excuse for throwing away those four days. I never can repair that, but I pledge myself to make you forget my injustice to you."

At this she rose. "You were not unjust — knowing David as you did. You taught me how fine, how great he was. Silva — would have been proud of his name."

There was another silence. Tisdale looked off again through the open door to the distant basin, and her glance returned to the fountain. "See!" she exclaimed. "A double rainbow!"

"Fate is with us again," he replied. "She's promising a better fight. But there is one debt more, soldier," and, catching her swift look, he saw the sparkles break softly in her eyes. "My ship sails for Alaska the tenth; I shall stay indefinitely, and I want you to pay me — in full — before I go."

THE END

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